VIDEOGAME CULTURE
OCTOBER 2005

EDGE

NINTENDO | SO[illegible] | MICROSOFT | PC | PORTABLE | COIN-OP | [illegible]ET-TOP | ONL

QUAKE 4

The firstperson shooter's founding fathers shake up Xbox 360

THE ULTIMATE GAME

Designing the most ambitious title of all time, on next-generation hardware

ON TEST: RETRO TO GO

How every single all-in-one gaming system, from C64 to SFII, stacks up

TREASURE UNEARTH

Japan's most revered action game st powers up with Gunstar Super He

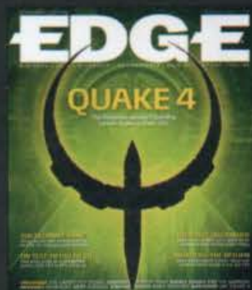
INVADERS: THE RETU

Taito's arcade legend is back – along a new Rainbow Islands on DS and

PREVIEWED GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES **DARKWATC** PURSUIT FORCE **BUBBLE BOBBLE EVO** THE WARRI
REVIEWED FAHRENHEIT **GEIST** OUENDAN **SENGOKU BASARA** MAKAI KINGDOMS **NANOSTRAY** APE ESCAF





Once, it was the 3D platform game. Then the driving game. Recently, however, it seems to have become the firstperson shooter's turn to be the most commonly maligned of all videogame genres. Partly, of course, this is because there are so many of the blessed things – and not all of them are particularly good (stand up, *Boiling Point* – if you're capable of doing so without falling over, that is).

But there is much to be said for the FPS as a gametype. It was instrumental in the birth of professional gaming, for instance. The best game of recent times is an FPS. And, importantly, the firstperson shooter is the quintessentially modern videogame, made possible only by fairly recent technological progress – its rules were not being laid down when *Head Over Heels* or *Pole Position* were making waves on home computers or in the arcades, and we have travelled a long way in a short space of time.

It's quite easy to see why the firstperson shooter has become so beloved (and, therefore, railed against by those who've run out of other things to moan about). It is, after all, the most tangible realisation of virtual reality we've seen; it removes the avatar and places us nearer to the *inside* of the experience than is possible in any other style of game. If gaming is escapism, the FPS moves us ever closer to the hatch.

Which brings us to *Quake 4*, the latest attempt by id Software to prove that it still has something to offer the genre it created and for so long dominated. Its plans are, perhaps surprisingly, both progressive and backward-looking. Read about them on page 42.

To those of you for whom the rise and rise of the FPS continues to be too much to bear, have a look at the all-in-one retro devices showcased this month on p74. One of them even plays *Pole Position*. 



EDGE

EDITORIAL
Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone +44 (0)1225 442244
Fax +44 (0)1225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge website www.edge-online.com

PEOPLE ON EDGE
Tony Mott editor
Margaret Robertson deputy editor
Ian Evenden production editor
Duncan Harris writer
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Darren Phillips art editor
Andrew Hind deputy art editor
Michael French online editor

CONTRIBUTORS
Koji Aizawa, Steven Bailey, Owain Bennallack, Mr Biffo, Brandon Boyer, Geraint Evans, Mark Green, Tim Guest, Jon Jordan, Gary Penn, Ben Schroder, Mark Walbank, Oliver Welsh

PRODUCTION
Colin Polis Future Plus buyer
Viv Turner senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager
Laura Cullingworth commercial buyer

CIRCULATION
Russell Hughes trade marketing manager
Duncan Shearer group circulation manager

ADVERTISING
Jayne Caple advertising director
Clare Williamson head of sales
Darren Gratton advertising manager
Richard Sturgess recruitment advertising
Ryan Ferguson online ad manager
Stuart Harris classified
Advertising phone 01225 442244

PUBLISHING
Matthew Pierce publisher
Ben Payne promotions manager
Simon Wear international licensing director

SUBSCRIPTIONS & DISTRIBUTION
Edge,
Future Publishing Ltd,
FREEPOST RLSC-SXSE-SKKT
Unit 4, Tower House, Sovereign Park,
Market Harborough, Leicestershire.
LE16 PEF
Email: games.subs@futurenet.co.uk
Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London. 0207 633 3333.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive
John Bowman group finance director

PRODUCTION OF EDGE
Hardware: Power Macintosh G4, G5
Software: Adobe InDesign, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Microsoft Office
Typography: (Adobe®) Frutiger Light, Regular, Bold, Black, Italic. Max (TF/LF) Light, Regular, Semi-Bold, Bold, Black, Italic. Simian (Display/Text) Orangutan, Chimpanzee, Gorilla. QType Book, Medium, Bold, Italic. Prensa Book, Bold, Italic. Bad Excuse, Bad Excuse Solid

Printed in the UK by Southernprint, Poole, Dorset

Edge is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of PC Gamer, GamesMaster, PlayStation2 Official Magazine-UK, PlayStation World, NGC, PSM2.

Future Publishing Ltd is part of Future plc.
Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, smart buying advice and which are a pleasure to read. Today we publish more than 150 magazines in the UK, US, France and Italy. Over 100 international editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com

"I want them alive, if possible. If not, wasted! But I want them. Send the word!"





ABC **31,819**
January-June 2005
(Audit Bureau of Circulation)



CONTENTS
OCTOBER

This month









5 B Boss	6 C Crate	7 N Ninja	8 O Objective	9 F Fighting	10 Ne Nebula
13 Al Alien	14 Si Sprite	15 P Physics	16 S Ranking	17 Cl Collectable	18 Ar Art
31 Ga Graphics	32 Ge Grenades	33 Dd Breasts	34 Se Speech	35 Br Branding	36 Ku Kung-Fu
49 In Intro	50 Sp Sports	51 Sq Squads	52 Te Texture	53 I Interface	54 Xe Shmup
81 Er Bugs	82 Pb Mario	83 Bi Baddie	84 Po Polygons	85 Ai AI	86 Rn Running

Every month

EDGE

CONTENTS
CONTINUED

Hype

Review



MAKAI KINGDOM



GEIST



BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE



SENGOKU BASARA



MUSHIHIMESAMA



OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN!



NANOSTRAY



VIRTUA TENNIS WORLD TOUR



MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION





START













Biohazard 5 was a highlight of both Sony's and Microsoft's events in Japan, although the project is far from completion. Capcom was keen to emphasise the game's level of detail, using individual polygons to render the stubble on its hero's face





EVENTS

Japan braces itself for next generation

Sony and Microsoft finally take their roadshows east and begin the battle for future-focused hearts and minds



As the stopwatch for the next generation continued to tick down, the two most aggressive contenders gathered together Japan's videogame industry in July to lay claim to the future of gaming. Held at the Tokyo Prince Hotel and lasting over a backside-numbing six hours, Sony's PlayStation Meeting was appropriately protracted considering the three platforms the company now supports.

PS2, predictably, is refusing to lie down in anticipation of its successor, with few people hesitant in hailing Level 5's *Rogue Galaxy* the surprise highlight of the conference – a sentiment bolstered by the game's presentation as something of a *Final Fantasy* killer, together with the unfettered confidence of both its developer and SCE in general. Indeed, the advanced cel-shaded visuals and overall grandeur of this lavish RPG stand it in good stead for its 2005 release.

Lasting over a backside-numbing six hours, Sony's PlayStation Meeting was appropriately protracted considering the three platforms the company now supports

Final Fantasy itself, meanwhile, has had plenty to live up to after the two-year hiatus of *FFXII* between the E3s of 2003 and 2005. A secluded region of the showfloor played host to the queues that had developed in anticipation of the game's playable return, 200 demo machines in place to meet the expected demand.

Those expecting a substantial evolution in exchange for those years of waiting had cause for concern, however. Unrefined, heavily aliased and sometimes simply bland, the game's demonstrated environments could claim the benefit of the doubt due to their unfinished state, but never managed to fully assure their audience that, after so much work and so much misfortune (Matsuno having now officially departed Square Enix on grounds of ill health), the game would emerge as anything other than an offline *FFXI* with visuals technically not much stronger than those of *FFX*.

This is a streamlined *Final Fantasy* – one without detached battles and with enemies made more noticeable so they can be avoided by the hurried player. It shares with *FFXI* the roots of an MMORPG, placing your party in the midst of a living world where the evolving behaviour of NPCs influences their interactions. Enemies can interrupt battles while they're in progress, while the action within those encounters is largely automatic. The coloured line attack system from *FFXI* has been implemented, while the ATB gauge continues to ensure that characters can only act at appropriately timed intervals. Importantly, a manual mode is included for those who don't want to see their inventory of health and magic items depleted by overcautious AI.

The implications of the game's objective-driven structure are interesting – such organisation forging an unusually solid path through its story that would avoid some of the more time-consuming item and character hunts of the previous games. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the audience at which this suite of changes has been aimed. Will purist *Final Fantasy* solo players acclimatise to or accept this *XI*-inspired direction? If not, will fans of a faster-paced adventure instead seek it out, or will its perched position between the two markets ultimately deprive it of both? Matsuno's directive while still

PS3 Evaluation System

2005 spring ~



Cell 2.4GHz GeForce XDR512MB

PS3 Reference Tool

2005 December~

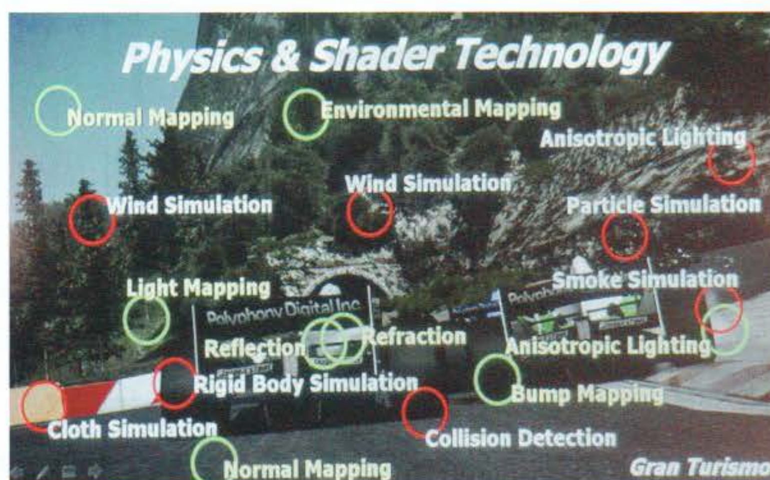


Cell 3.2GHz RSX XDR512MB
BD/DVD/CD drive HDD

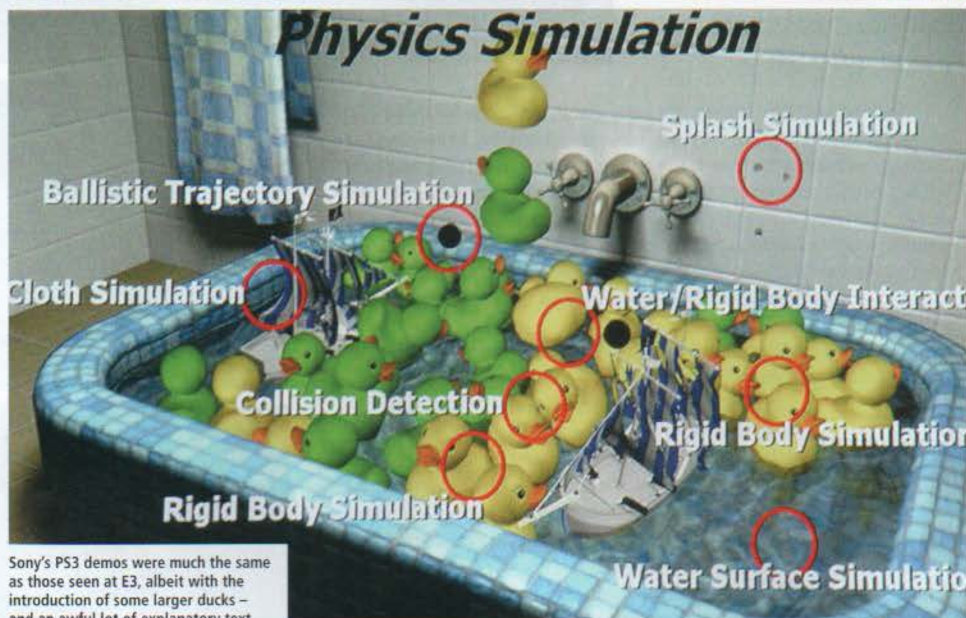
The audience at Sony's PlayStation Meeting was made up of representatives from publishing and development, the latter group particularly interested to see how Sony's PS3 R&D hardware is progressing. The company's first, hulking dev kit (top) is soon to be phased out and replaced by a slinkier unit



Namco's *Ridge Racer* (in-game model) will appear first on 360







Sony's PS3 demos were much the same as those seen at E3, albeit with the introduction of some larger ducks – and an awful lot of explanatory text



The numbers game

Sony used its conference to reveal some big figures…

Hardware units sold to date:

PlayStation 2:		91.62m
	Asia:	21.41m
	US:	37m
	Europe:	33.21m
PSP:		5.07m
	Japan:	2.74m
	US:	2.33m

Software units sold to date:

PlayStation 2:		863m
	Asia:	176m
	US:	395m
	Europe:	292m
PSP:		11.2m
	Japan:	3.9m
	US:	7.3m

attached to the project was to stimulate such change in the series' ideology, and clearly his influence has stuck.

If PS2's presence was one of defiance, then PSP's suggested real solidity. An extensive line-up of forthcoming games was shown, delivering much the same message as the recent spate of reassuring TV commercials aired in Japan: the best is yet to come. Reaction, however, was mixed.

Positively received were creative endeavours such as Yukihito Morikawa's new title, *Fuku Fuku No Shima* – an inventive take on the *Animal Crossing* mode of play where a year of realtime presents the player with various minigames and tasks. Namco's *Portable Resort*, similarly, struck a chord with its offbeat self-classification as an 'entertainment tool' – one that even claims to double as a Hawaiian guitar. Nonetheless, it was the faithful *Winning Eleven* series that garnered the most praise, its portable *Ubiquitous Edition* representing the PSP's key title for the year's end. Based on the recent *Winning Eleven 9* and boasting additional wireless play, Konami's game promises an undisclosed level of connectivity with its PS2 sibling.

Following the DS's lead in terms of revitalising its appeal as hardware, the PSP's Ceramic White iteration was unveiled as expected, together with details of its new, web-browser-equipped firmware which boasts additional multimedia upgrades such as downloadable media support. Sony is expecting a huge demand for PSP in Europe, and is ramping up the machine's manufacture accordingly. UMD sales in Japan, however, are being considered disappointing following the format's troubled uptake by the region's consumers.

The meeting's primary focus, however, was inevitably PS3. The presentation was keen to deliver three clear messages: developer support will be substantial, PS3 will be an integrative media centre, and shaders will be prioritised over polygons.

The cost of development didn't hide its head for long, Sony placing a strong emphasis on its desire to alleviate much of this burden from developers' shoulders. Recent deals with Havok, Transmeta and Ageia were highlighted, along with the acquisition of SN Systems and its specialised middleware. Sony's declared ambition is to create a complete and comprehensive environment for its developers, one undoubtedly enhanced by the signing of a deal with Epic Games to make the Unreal Engine 3 source code available as part of the PS3 SDK. Though such efforts will surely be appreciated, however, those developers working on launch-window titles for next spring may be expected to work without them.

Oddly, a character model demonstration by Koei not only failed to impress the assembled audience due to its similarity to an early PS2 demo, but also served to contradict Ken Kutaragi's dream of a shader-centred development community, boasting an obviously enormous polygon count. Bandai's *Gundam* demo, on the other hand, demonstrated a versatile realtime damage model thanks to its small development team's shaders.





Ninety-Nine Nights continues to be one of 360's most attractive-looking Japanese titles. Sony's Ceramic White PSP is similarly slick

Rounding the meeting off, the PlayStation Awards for this year played to a somewhat diminished audience (thanks entirely to the already demanding running time). Gold awards (500,000 copies sold) were given to games including *MGS3: Snake Eater*, *Dragon Ball Z 3* and *Super Robot Taisen MX*, while million-selling Platinum award winners included *Winning Eleven 8* and *Gran Turismo 4*. Unsurprisingly, *Dragon Quest VIII* received a special Triple Platinum prize in recognition of its three million copies sold.

Four days later, it was Microsoft's turn to counter this epic showcase with one of its own, staged at Tokyo's Akasaka Prince Hotel. The expectation had long been that the company would fare much better on this occasion that it had at the original Xbox Summit years before, but while this was true to a degree, it wasn't the whole story.

There may have been a slightly cautious response in Japan to the company's pre-E3 announcement, but there was no denying the strength of the 360's launch line-up, especially when compared to that of the original Xbox. The appearance of *Ridge Racer 6* on 360 prior to PS3 is a telling turn of events – one that is only consolidated following

The appearance of Ridge Racer 6 on 360 prior to PS3 is a telling turn of events – one that is only consolidated following the announcement that over 1,000 360 devkits are in Japanese hands

the announcement that over 1,000 development kits have been in the hands of Japanese developers for the last year.

While Tecmo and From Software are continuing their support for the Xbox brand, the involvement of Namco and Capcom has dramatically increased this generation. *Biohazard 5* – also demonstrated at Sony's meeting – made an encouraging, albeit brief appearance, though neither that title nor *Ridge Racer* will remain solely on 360. Quite how many of those publisher's titles will actually prove exclusive is something that neither conference made clear, and the prospect of shared titles looking superior on PS3 hardware marks an interesting turnaround.

Mixed messages were sent out by some of the Summit's other presentations: Bandai conspicuously announced that it had nothing to show due to its efforts being concentrated elsewhere – a clear reference to the PS3 *Gundam* demo shown mere days before. Banpresto made a more substantial impression with its *Super Robot Taisen* licence, even if its vocal support for 360 eclipsed, in many people's eyes, the actual quality of the product on show. Success' announcement of *Zoo Keeper*, meanwhile, even frightened some at the conference – its presence in the line-up apparently reminding them of the stream of low-budget titles that came to almost solely represent the original Xbox in Japan.

Crucially, a sentiment among many was that 360 is more 'PS2.5' than a fully fledged upgrade to Xbox, competing against PS2's continued market resilience rather than its upcoming successor. Several referred to the Dreamcast's fate when discussing the new console's potential – something that was at total odds with what Microsoft was aiming to achieve with its event. It seems it won't be until the company can unveil substantial and exclusive content that a powerfully sceptical audience will be convinced.





Peter Moore stands alongside key members from Japan's dev community at Microsoft's event (above), while Square Enix and its collaborators from Level 5 and Armor Project join Sony on stage to celebrate *Dragon Quest VIII* winning a Triple Platinum award in recognition of three million copies sold (main)





Edinburgh celebrates difficult third year

For many, this year's Edinburgh Interactive Entertainment Festival was make or break. In practice, it made some clear errors, but broke some useful new ground

For an event with such promise, the Edinburgh games festival's conference got off to a very inauspicious start. Host Clive Tyldesley (the voice of *FIFA 2006*) kicked off proceedings with a well-intentioned but ill-judged joke about the event's recent name change, prophesying that the title would continue to change year on year. For an event which was still clearly struggling to find, and communicate, its identity and purpose, it was a little too close to the bone. This was followed by the keynote address from Adam Singer, former CEO of Telewest and current group CEO of the MCPS-PRS Alliance, the organisation that oversees the collection and distribution of royalties and licence fees from the recording and performance of music. His opening salvo – to argue that games could not yet lay claim to being a mainstream cultural force because they couldn't yet make their players cry – raised an audible groan from some delegates. The EIEF had been billed as an event where gaming's cultural strengths would be celebrated and furthered, not dismissed out of hand.

The speech sketched out where Singer felt games needed to go in order to become truly mainstream. What was needed was a shift in content, to include better stories, more factually based material and, crucially, market-wooing eroticism. It was a perception based on analogies to the film and television industries, and carried some weight. There's little doubt that games could have better stories, and that their increased use in the education and training spheres enhances their legitimacy while growing their market. However, he failed to address the reasons why pornography – which has fuelled the spread of photography, cinema, home video and internet technologies – had failed to penetrate the videogame industry. And, while many game makers would be happy to set their sights higher in terms of the emotional sophistication of their games, Singer didn't seem aware that his central argument – that more emotionally resonant games were vital for enlarging gaming's audience – is continually contradicted by the reality this industry faces: it's the games which go furthest down this route which most commonly face dismal sales.

Despite these frustrations, it was a crucial keynote. That someone with so much experience of a wide range of media industries, and someone with a strong enough interest in the videogame industry to be willing to come to address the EIEF, could have so little insight into the current capabilities of the best gaming has to offer demonstrates just how big a challenge this industry faces in communicating that potential to the world at large. As Singer himself pointed out, this is a business which is struggling to find a voice, one which – despite its increasing economic clout – continues to fly under the radar of government and the creative industries. And, as such, his keynote set the perfect tone for the EIEF: this is the challenge to be faced, this is why the Edinburgh games festival is so badly needed.

It wasn't a tone that was matched by the rest of the conference's first day. A reliance on the panel format meant that although interesting discussions were had – on the future of the mobile industry, the role of handheld gaming and the potential for game technology to dominate television – there was a failure to form many solid conclusions. The general air was low-key and sometimes too informal – one panel chair ruefully admitting that delegates would have done better to have sat with the panellists in the pub the previous night, on the grounds that the discussion there had "put this fucking session to shame." It got a laugh, but a slightly bitter one from delegates who had travelled from around the world to see what the EIEF had to offer. The day closed on an even more wavering note, with the light relief of a game-related spoof on Have I Got News For You plagued with technical hiccups and parochial in-jokes which left international delegates feeling even more mystified as to why they had bothered making the trip. The problem for Edinburgh is that while every conference has its weak links – and there have been many worse sessions at top-class events like GDC – at the EIEF, where nearly all



Delegate response to the conference was mixed – some found one good presentation was satisfaction enough, others were left more interested in after-show networking sessions





Adam Singer (right) gave receptive delegates plenty to think about – and disagree with – in his challenging keynote address

delegates attend nearly all sessions, there is nowhere to hide. With only a dozen or so slots, if more than a handful show their cracks then the overall impression can quickly become negative.

Another surprise was the low turnout – despite stronger ticket sales than the previous two years, the conference centre was often sparsely filled, and it was hard to escape the feeling that the bulk of the audience was made up of speakers, organisers and participants rather than actual attendees. The reason was, no doubt, partly that delegates were taking advantage of Go Play Games and the game screenings being housed in the same centre as the conference, but it failed to give the event much atmosphere or impetus.

The second day was a much stronger event, focusing as it did on the EIEF's real heartland – the creative accomplishments and future potential of gaming. The standout session was a fascinating and energising lecture from Ken Perlin, a professor at the Media Research Lab at New York University. Focusing on the hard question of how games are going to manage the technology to answer Singer's call for more emotionally elaborate content, Perlin recommended a more widespread adoption of procedurally generated animation and dialogue. It was a technical talk, brilliantly leavened by Perlin's pithy Java applet demonstrations (which can all be played with at his website, mrl.nyu.edu/~perlin), and is exactly the kind of content Edinburgh needs. Interestingly, it was the kind of session which would have looked like a risk on paper – a technically skewed thinkpiece to be delivered to a non-technical crowd – but in the hands of such a compelling speaker, even the EIEF's broad audience was carried along.



One of the biggest hits of both the Go Play Games event and the screenings was *Nintendogs*, with an able demonstration bringing out the best – and the silliest – in an already irresistible game







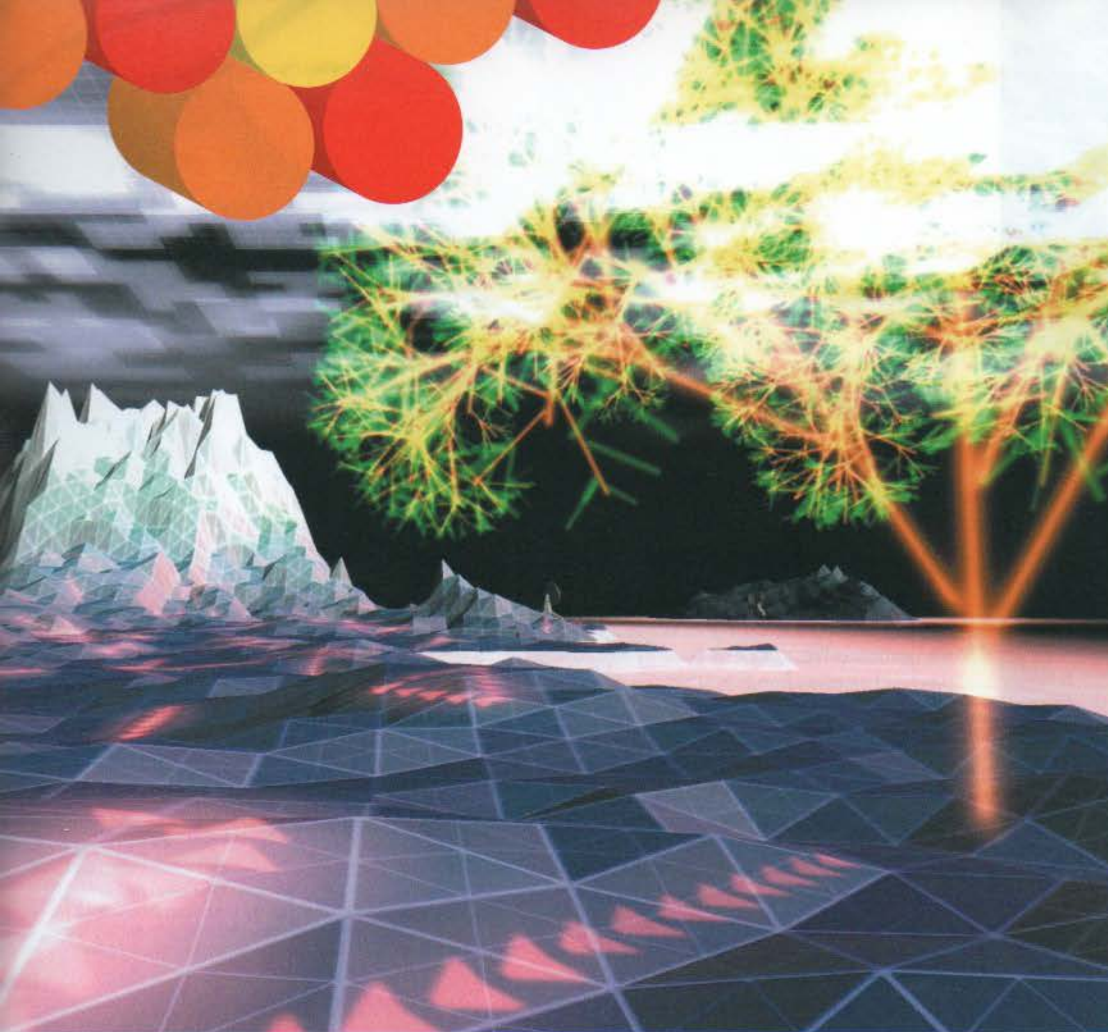
The screenings, including *The Movies*, *EyeToy: Kinetic*, *Wallace & Gromit: Curse Of The Were-Rabbit* and *Darwinia*, were very successful, but suffered from being scheduled against some of the main conference's better sessions

The other strengths of the day were often simply the show-and-tell aspects. For all of the good sense talked during the Games Are Good For You session, nothing did as much to shift the audience's understanding of how the uses of gaming technology can evolve than footage from Sony's *EyeToy Kinetic* and an educational game from Learning Lab Denmark called *Homicide*. Similarly, the session on machinima played a crucial role in simply demonstrating how fast the evolution, and how great the potential, is of this unexpected outlet for gaming creativity. Not that the day was without its ironies. Opening with a session of rants, clearly inspired by the passionate vitriol poured out at GDC, the speakers were mild-mannered and unfocused in their pleas for some form of UK game council and for a wider acceptance of in-game advertising. When Epic's Mark Rein took the stage to deliver the only rant of the day with meat on its bones and fire in its belly – decrying second-hand game sales and rentals as effective piracy – the chair intervened with a caution to be "slightly less aggressive." Very British, perhaps, but enormously frustrating. Later in the day, while a number of TV and game industry veterans soldiered through a rather abstract discussion on whether or not games can be funny, a hundred or so members of the public were gathered across the hall in the screening room, scarlet-faced with laughter at a demonstration of

While TV and game industry veterans soldiered through a discussion on whether or not games can be funny, a hundred or so people across the hall were laughing to a demo of Nintendogs



The EIEF05 Edge Award jury chose *Half-Life 2* as their prize winner. The public vote continued after the festival and the result of that award has since been announced on Edge Online



Nintendogs. It added to the overall impression that the conference simply wasn't managing to cut down into the crux of the current state of gaming.

The festival's three-headed format – the screenings, Go Play Games, and the conference – can still seem confusing. Go Play Games is an event that in the long-term can't fail – gamers want to play new games, publishers want gamers to see their products. The screenings, which in their first year were a peculiar proposition, now need less explaining, and the virtue of game makers being able to present their work in a cinema setting to an interested and varied audience is clear. But neither of those events necessarily needs to be held in Edinburgh. They would be as effective in London, or Birmingham, or Glasgow. The point of being in Edinburgh is to raise the status of gaming's cultural impact and to force debate about its creative future. The EIEF's conference is the only chance the industry gets to come together not to shout its wares, but to explore its real potential.

This year, the intention behind the name change was to attract professionals from other creative industries who might otherwise be put off by the perceived stigma of the word 'games'. The result, however, was to dilute the focus of an event whose raison d'etre is to have gaming at its heart. The Edinburgh festival does not yet have sufficient status to attract heavyweight interest from other fields, and it seems unlikely that it will come to do so unless it can find a more confident solidarity behind the medium it is intended to celebrate. Widening the context so that it can woo a wider demographic may be part of the event's future, but its present must simply better serve the needs of the game industry. Gaming isn't just an industry that's struggling to find a global voice; it's struggling to find an internal voice. Many within the industry lack conviction about its creative future, many more lack information about its most interesting new directions. The power that Edinburgh has is not to concentrate the debate in one room for two days, but to fuel delegates with a year's worth of enthusiasm and ammo to push forward gaming's ambitions and status. It remains an event with a unique and important potential, but it will require a more fundamental rethink than another name change to take full advantage of it.





Epic's Mark Rein was the best of the festival's 'ranters' and didn't like being shushed once he'd built up a head of steam. More time to debate his points would have been welcome



EVENT

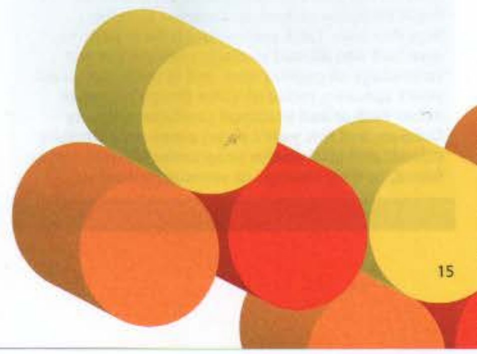
Daring to be original

Scotland's premier game design competition reaches its climax

One of the biggest missed opportunities of EIEF was the inclusion of a showcase featuring the work of the students competing in the Dare To Be Digital event. In an organisational mix-up fairly hard to forgive at such a small conference, there was no one available to present the session, which meant that the students' work was shown without any explanation and, worse, without any sound at all. Despite the uncomfortable atmosphere, the sheer variety and visual flair of the teams' work shone through, raising a genuine sense of enthusiasm and respect for how much they had accomplished in such a short space of time. The Develop Award for the game with the most real-world potential went to a fish breeding game called *Fishisms* from the team Gene Therapy. However, it was clear that the festival's heart belonged to Missing Link's action-puzzler game (above), which sees the player forming hand-holding chains with passers-by, the properties of the chain altering depending on the nature of the individuals it contains.



The session demonstrating how machinima is 'culture-jacking' Hollywood, run by Aleks Krotoski, was warmly received, joining the dots on a number of the festival's themes of serious uses of game technology and opportunities for creative expression





Genji's easygoing gameplay and the revelation that his debut 360 title is a multiplayer board game have suprised some observers, but Okamoto is devoted to inclusiveness



Voting Republican

Game Republic's Yoshiki Okamoto reflects on providing action for everybody with Genji

Nearly 25 years in the industry under his (black) belt have obviously taught Okamoto to take jetlag in his stride: we find him 'chilling out' during his European tour for the upcoming PAL release of *Genji* by high-kicking overhead bamboo fronds in SCEE's inner courtyard. His rapidly growing, multiple-studio company is currently developing six games, including *Everyparty* on Xbox 360 and a second *Genji* title for PS3, but it's the original *Genji* that has set the agenda for his new republic.

It's been a month since *Genji*'s release in Japan – how has it been received so far?

We received a Gold award in Famitsu, which was very nice [laughs], and in our first week of sales we made first place in Famitsu's rankings. We've been getting a lot of good feedback from users: that it was a game they wanted to get to the very end of, and more importantly that they were able to get to the end of it! Surprisingly, we received a lot of response from female gamers in Japan – not only the hardcore audience – who really enjoyed the game.

As for right now, I'm not quite sure what impression I'm making on the European press. But it seems to be positive.

> **"The difficult part is not creating a game that people can finish: that just means making it simple. What's difficult is creating a game that people can finish but they also *want* to finish"**

What are your personal feelings on its success as Game Republic's debut title?

I'd give it an 8/10. Obviously with any title you cannot include everything you want to, but as a professional game creator, my job is to finish the game on time, make a title that will make money, and to keep the quality high. So in retrospect, although there are several features I would have liked to add, I'm happy with the finished game.

You've referred to it as 'a game that could be finished by everybody'. Does that make for a more difficult development process than pitching to the traditional gaming market?

When I started developing games on the Famicom, it was a matter of just creating a game and if the users could finish it – that was fine. If they couldn't, well, that was fine too. When I worked on *Street Fighter II*, it was a game that you would get better at the more you played, but there's a lot of practice involved. The games market has changed from what it used to be, though, and now it requires titles that people can finish, and see the ending – like having watched a movie.

The difficult part is not creating a game that people can finish: that just means making it simple. What's difficult is creating a game that people can finish but they also *want* to finish – a game that will give them a good experience, but not make them feel they're being cheated or not getting their money's worth.

Were you concerned that those hardcore gamers, who would have followed you because of name recognition from Capcom, were expecting a stiffer challenge?

Yes, I was worried that those people would not get what they expected with *Genji*. But they have to understand that was then, and this is now: I'm not Okamoto of Capcom any more, I'm Okamoto of Game Republic, who wants to create games that everybody can enjoy. That's what I want to keep doing. Right now, I feel that I'm the new, improved Okamoto. I believe I'm making better games.

What experience with a massmarket or even a non-gaming audience do you base your design decisions on?

I like to think I've been getting my feedback from players of all the games I have made in the past. When you develop arcade games, you have to tune them to make players keep putting in the coins, to make the difficulty increase at certain points when



Oddly, *Genji*'s lush visuals are a source of both pride and slight regret for Okamoto: "Because we focused on the graphical experience, there are some areas that may be confusing to play. I would have liked more time to tweak the camera angles"

Newswire



Aussie development matters

It may be a hosted in a country where banning games seems as popular a pastime as making them, but the Australian Game Developers' Conference – now in its seventh year – has become an event that should nonetheless be printed in bold on the industry calendar. From December 1-3, the Melbourne gathering promises to bring together over 1,000 professionals from both its own turf and abroad to discuss the design and technology of gaming now and in the future. Last year's speakers included Valve design manager Robin Walker and Irrational producer Anthony Oakden, and this year's event promises a similarly eclectic and informative programme. Details can be found, as they emerge, at www.agdc.com.au





you want another coin out of them. When I was overseeing both arcade and console games at Capcom, my first game was *Resident Evil*, and that's very much a game that you can either finish or you can't. So people may have thought I wasn't interested in making games for everybody, yet I've always wanted to create user-friendly games. I think that, as a person, I'm a user-friendly person! I've listened to players, and now I'm acting on it.

Is *Genji's* system for teaching the player the art of counter-attacking something you created specifically for the game, or that you've considered for some time?

Action games are either aggressive, all about chasing after enemies, or passive, where you're on the receiving end and have to run. I don't think there's really been a game that has both aspects, where you're going after the enemy and they're also coming after you. That's what an action game should be, and is the basis for *Genji's* system. Did you play *Street Fighter II* a lot? Who do you think is the most powerful of Ryu and Ken?

It's possible that our attention was more captured by Chun-Li at the time.

[Laughs] OK. You got me thinking about the counter-attacks in *Street Fighter II*. Basically, Ryu and Ken use the exact same program, they're copies, other than the graphics change. We had thought counter-attacks would be an interesting addition to the game, so they had parameters when each character would be vulnerable to counter attack. Say Ryu would do his Shoryuken, which was very damaging, but he could also receive a large amount of damage. But we thought it was too difficult a concept for players at that time, so we got rid of all those parameters – apart from Ryu's, which we forgot to erase. He has a vulnerable point while Ken doesn't, and that's why Ken is more powerful.

So from back then I had these ideas about counter-attacks, and *Genji* is the next step towards the final product, of action that's more realistic – you see it in boxing, how a boxer is more vulnerable when he makes his attack. We're very close, and I hope people play *Genji* and learn the system to prepare themselves for the next game's system, which we will try to fine-tune into that final product.

You also fit lecturing at game design schools into your schedule. What do you hope you're imparting to your students that they can use as the next wave of Japanese developers?

When students are about to graduate and decide they want to come to these schools and get into the games industry, what they should be thinking is not 'I want to get into the industry', but 'I want to be a leader within the industry' – to create titles everybody will know about. The message that I try to give students is that their dreams should be as big as they can be, not just to be content with getting a job doing whatever they can. If their goal is just to work in the industry, then they're not going to be the people that will invigorate the Japanese gaming market, and lead the games industry back to class-A titles that everyone wants to play.





WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Surely the largest collection of its kind, the Internet Archive's massive array of speed runs, shooter best-play demos, ageing electronic press kit videos, machinima and traditional video previews numbers well into the thousands and spans almost the entirety of game history.

As with any collection of this size, the quality and entertainment value of the videos varies widely, but even at its worst scores points for novelty as a period piece. The cream of the crop are already well highlighted by the IA's staff, from a *Neverhood* press kit featuring interviews with Doug TenNapel and Steven Spielberg themselves, an ancient *Doom II* preview personalised with comments from the dev team, and the infamous Don't Copy That Floppy rap.

Site: Internet Archive: Game Videos
URL: www.archive.org/details/gamevideos





INTERVIEW



Rainbow Islands Revolution's initial art style was perhaps a little too saccharine, but the basic rainbow-drawing dynamic has remained, as seen in the preview on p35

Upwardly mobile

Marvelous president Yasuhiro Wada (above) and producer Tony Byus discuss evolution and revolution at Rising Star

The pairing of *Harvest Moon* developer Marvelous Interactive and Bergsala AB – Nintendo's oldest export customer – as Rising Star Games may have raised some eyebrows, but the design decisions behind some of the company's more ambitious Taito handheld remakes are surprising, to say the least. As its *Evolution* (PSP) and *Revolution* (DS) series prepare to ring in the changes (see preview on p35), two of its shining lights discuss past and present.

What was the thinking behind the formation of Rising Star Games?

Yasuhiro Wada: Key staff at Marvelous and Bergsala have known each other for many years, as both have long and fruitful relationships with Nintendo – Bergsala particularly as it's been distributing Nintendo products in the Nordic region for some 25 years. With Rising Star, the idea was first conceived at the Tokyo Game Show in 2003. Both companies came together over a few cups of sake and realised they wanted to do the same thing: combine forces and exploit each other's strengths to expand our horizons beyond our traditional markets.

Other attempts to bring Japanese games more directly to the European market (such as Eidos' Fresh Games imprint) have often floundered. What makes Rising Star different?

YW: Rising Star has been set up as a hybrid of western and eastern development and game design philosophies. Rather than directly transplant Japanese-sourced products into the western market, we have a mixture of Japanese and European staff working on the development of our games, specifically created to appeal to both audiences. There's also a great deal of consultation with the experienced European staff to make sure the products are accessible to both markets. While this balance isn't easy to find, it is genuinely possible and we feel it's the way forward for Rising Star Games to establish a unique position.

Do you think there are real differences between the tastes of European and Japanese gamers, or do you think that European gamers simply aren't given a chance to experience a wide range of Japanese software?

YW: It's impossible to deny that there aren't differences in taste between those groups of gamers, but those tastes are determined by what's available and how those games are presented. It's true that some of the popular Japanese titles don't cross over as successfully as they perhaps could and, of course, exposing Europe to a wider range of Japanese games would be fantastic. But that's not really our objective. Rising Star is about finding a harmony between the desires of Japanese and European audiences, then developing and releasing games that appeal to both.

Having made its name with the *Harvest Moon* games – quite forward-thinking, non-traditional games – why did Marvelous make the decision to licence the Taito properties?

Tony Byus: Primarily passion. We all love the *Bubble Bobble* series and it's a well-known brand that has been requested as a candidate for updating many, many times. We also had a good relationship with Dreams, the development studio headed by *Space Invaders* creator Tomohiro Nishikado. Dreams has long-standing ties to Taito, hence us being able to get licences to create the updates we passionately wanted to. We had been planning cooperative projects between Dreams and Marvelous for some time, and Rising Star Games is the ideal outlet for them.

How did you decide to go about updating the games for PSP/DS? How do you find the balance between simply reproducing games that are 20 years out of date and reinventing them so much that they're no longer true to the games they're based on?

TB: We wanted to update the games by taking into account how standards have changed over the years, but mostly to exploit the possibilities for those original designs to be expanded by making the most of the new hardware available. Also, the games we are updating have strong and brilliantly simple concepts in their design. As long as those concepts are kept in place, *Rainbow Islands Revolution*, for example, will still be *Rainbow Islands*. Provided we make the most of the new hardware and apply what we've learned in the time that's passed since the titles were first released, the games will be fresh, modern interpretations of brilliant concepts – an ideal every developer/publisher aspires to.

Do you think there is much awareness of games like *Rainbow Islands* and *Bubble Bobble* among young gamers today?

YW: There's probably less awareness today than there was ten years ago. However, both titles are considered legendary by dedicated gamers and are very much respected across all the videogaming territories. Hopefully, updates such as ours will help keep that legend alive and introduce the series to an audience who were too young to experience games like *Bubble Bobble* when they were cutting-edge. That said, there is still a growing trend for playing old titles on modern machines, as if the audience as a whole is realising that preserving the roots of modern games is as essential to videogaming as it is to cinema, music or literature.



OUT THERE

A WINNER/ LOSER IS YOU



Created by University of Tokyo's Yasuaki Kakehi and Takeshi Naemura, Through The Looking Glass is an installation that allows a player to challenge themselves to a game of *Pong*. Using a system of projectors, mirrors and a Lumisty Film tabletop – a specially designed display device capable of showing multiple distinct images at the same time when viewed at opposite angles – the setup puts the player in the curious position of being the champion and the defeated, regardless of how well or poorly they perform. It's currently the most elaborate use of Lumisty, but the duo have otherwise noted the display's potential in allowing closely arranged groups to have their own private game views simply by nature of their vantage point.





Rouse's love of writing has found expression in more than just his scripts: he's the author of a book entitled Game Design: Theory And Practice, now in its second edition



Anatomy of a monster

Surreal Software's Richard Rouse gets under the flayed skin of videogame horror to show us what makes The Suffering tick

At college, **Richard Rouse** (above) was torn between majoring in English or the "more marketable" computer science: as both scriptwriter and lead designer of Midway's prison horror *The Suffering*, he combined the two. It was enough of a success for Midway to acquire developer Surreal Software and commission a sequel, with Rouse uniting his jobs under the title of creative director. He explains how he's mixing everything from vintage computer RPGs to gritty TV police procedurals into *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*, and why he's writing a story with three beginnings and multiple endings.



Strong content and an individual style are particularly important in horror titles. How do the *Suffering* games set themselves apart?

It's distinctly an American game, as opposed to a lot of other horror games, which have been Japanese. I think that lends it a different tone, a bit more realistic than they are in some ways. You know, *Resident Evil* has Racoon City which is this very abstracted place that's not really anywhere, whereas we're definitely trying to do Baltimore, and we're trying to tie in to specific historical events that it's reasonable would have happened in Baltimore. We've got underground railroad, slave era, pre-Civil War history stuff in the game that ties into one of the major boss characters, who was a slave hunter. I think that tying into real-world events makes the game even more horrific. We did that in the first game as well: the death penalty's still really real in the States, and things like that are unsettling just to think about.

Why Baltimore?

Well, the first game was set off the coast of Maryland on the prison island there. And I had lived in DC, which is about an hour south of Baltimore. We wanted to set it in America. I wanted to deal with American history that I knew a lot about. We wanted to have somewhere that has a really long-standing period of history – on the west coast of the United States, for example, everything's from the last hundred years. There aren't a lot of old structures, not as much has happened there. Having it in the mid-Atlantic sort of area meant we were able to have a witch-burning – that took place in Massachusetts and, well, Maryland, that's kind of close – and then we could also have the Southern slavery thing.

Torque's definitely an urban character, so it made sense to go to a city, and Baltimore's very nearby in the heart of Maryland. It's also a pretty bleak city in a lot of ways. It's got nice parts, but a large portion of the city has been ravaged by drugs. It's got rows of houses that are abandoned for blocks and blocks and blocks – it can be pretty



Torque will also face an intelligent human foe in *Ties That Bind*, one that comes in the form of shadowy commandos The Foundation: Surreal is determined to include more gameplay sophistication and variety this time









The Mainliner expresses the horror of drug addiction just as its predecessor in the *The Suffering* embodied the fear of lethal injection; in touches like this, *Ties That Bind* suggests that the slum is just another prison

depressing. I had watched a lot of Homicide: Life On The Street and knew that this is a pretty cool city that isn't overdone like New York or LA, and The Wire [HBO cop show] – I only started watching that after the first game, but that show's incredible.

Are there particular horror works – of any medium – that have influenced you?
In terms of games, *Half-Life* was the high bar. Not many people think of it as a horror title but it's got a lot of that. That was the mark in terms of merging horror and action, even though it's never

"Half-Life was the high bar. Not many people think of it as a horror title but it's got a lot of that. That was the mark in terms of merging horror and action"

marketed as a horror game. In terms of films, I'm a big Hitchcock fan. The Birds is a really good example of this force of nature coming in: 'The world has turned on us, what's going on?' Which is a lot of what's going on in *The Suffering*.

In *Resident Evil* they've got the fixed camera, they can really control what the player can and can't see, things come right out at you. They can use a lot of film technique. Here, the player's got control of the camera, we can't use as much. So I tried to think of it as literary horror, whether it's Poe or Stephen King even, it's really more a tone and a mood, it's not like you turn the page and go: 'Oh!' and drop the book out of surprise. Jack Ketchum's another writer I really like. Getting that tone of a good horror novel was definitely important, making sure it's disturbing even if it's not startling you at every turn.

How are you continuing your branching, moral narrative experiments from the first *Suffering*?
We have three different beginnings that tie into the three different endings of the first game... It goes back to when you played *Ultima* or *Bard's Tale* or something from that mid-'80s era, on say the Apple II, where you could keep playing with the same party in a new game by importing them from your old one. I really liked that. At the time we thought it was a great idea, but it becomes really complex with three different beginnings and the three moral paths you can follow on this game. It creates a lot of different permutations. There are multiple parts to the ending and different parts will change in different ways – the endings change based on your beginning and your moral path, so there's different ways things turn out.

Is that kind of interactive narrative something you always wanted to do in games?
Absolutely. One of the reasons I got into games was thinking that when you read a novel the story is not happening to you, it's happening to other characters, and you're seeing the choices they make and how that leads to their downfall, or whatever. Wouldn't it be cool if you could make your choices in an interactive setting and then say: 'I didn't like how that turned out, what if I made another choice here?' I'm less concerned with telling a specific story than saying: 'Here's this world where these things can happen, make the choices you want'. And if that means the narrative's a little bit more boring on this side but a little bit more exciting on the other, well, you lose a little bit, but you gain a lot.



HYPER-OLYMPIC

The result of London-based artist and designer Crispin Jones' musings on athletic perfection, man versus machine and players cheating digital opponents, ZXZX is a device that strives to play the perfect game of Konami's *Track & Field*. 'Playing a computer game against an automatic (computer-controlled) opponent can still engender feelings of elation at winning, or frustration at losing', he writes. 'This seems to me to be one of the more peculiar aspects of our relationship with the computer. What does it mean to cheat this unseeing opponent?' And you can see precisely what it means when ZXZX roundly trounces the computer on Jones' website at www.mr-jones.org/tnf, as well as download a MAME replay video showing ZXZX achieving the impossible perfect game.

• www.mr-jones.org/tnf


AWARDS


Resident Evil 4 unsurprisingly leads the GameCube charge, but it's *San Andreas* which seems certain to win biggest






Only a handful of UK-produced games make the final cut, with the likes of *Lego Star Wars* and *Wipeout Pure* leading the charge

Winners in waiting

The usual suspect from Rockstar heads up the 2005 Golden Joystick contenders

As the UK's largest gaming awards roll round once again, the finalists in each category – voted for by gamers – can be announced. Unsurprisingly, it's *San Andreas* which dominates, nominated in each of the eight categories it was eligible for. The PC category is dominated by old names – *Half-Life 2*, *The Sims University* and *Rollercoaster Tycoon* fight it out amongst others, including the grudge-match-in-waiting of *Football Manager 2005* versus *Championship Manager 5*. The expected sequels (*GTA: San Andreas*, *Gran Turismo 4*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*) are mixed on the PS2 shortlist with new titles such as *God Of War* and *Destroy All Humans*, and Microsoft's machine shows its quality with titles such as *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* and *Forza Motorsport*. The GameCube hasn't had the most fertile of years, but *Killer 7*, *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door*, *Resident Evil 4* and *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure* serve as a reminder of how sound a console it is.

The handheld category – perhaps pointing to UK gamers' frustration at being left behind the rest of the world – features a number of games not yet released at the time of the vote: *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*, *Burnout Legends*, *Ridge Racer* and *Wipeout Pure* join the rather more available *The Minish Cap* and *Wario Ware Touched!* on the shortlist. Other categories raise an eyebrow – *Resident Evil 4* as the best film-based game of 2005? The serially delayed *STALKER* still only One To Watch for 2006?

The final winners will be announced at the award ceremony in London on November 4 – last year ably hosted by Matt Lucas' Marjorie Dawes. To have your say in this year's results, visit the website (www.goldenjoysticks.co.uk).

Continue

Waiting for Zelda
A few more months will only make it better, right?

Parties at EIEF
You know you shouldn't, but you just can't help it

DS on the move
So many bite-sized morsels to nibble on

Quit

PSP on the move
Distractions... keep... stopping... progress...

Glitches at EIEF
Next year's event can only run more smoothly

Waiting for Zelda
What will GC owners want for Christmas now?

Author: Matt Kelland, Dave Morris, Dave Lloyd
Publisher: ILEX
ISBN: 1 904705 64 2



MACHINIMA

From guns and bombs to putting the kettle on

Emerging from the slippery interaction between games, films and CG animation comes Machinima. Developed out of the firstperson shooter mod scene, this process of making films using game technology has been gaining traction thanks to the enthusiasm of its supporters and occasional commercial success of titles such as the quirky *Halo*-based Red vs Blue, in which the soldiers bitch about existence within a war-torn gameworld.

As Morris, Kelland and Lloyd set out in this overview, which covers aspects such as history, case studies with practitioners and basic techniques, there's certainly plenty going on. Yet despite the variety, which ranges from the arthouse visuals of Friedrich Kirschner's The Journey to the slapstick in-game antics of Battlefield Stuntacular, featuring players jumping from plane to plane in mid-air, or the remaking of parts of Aliens using *Halo* (Haliens), machinima remains a niche in flux.

This seems to be due to a combination of the technical expertise required to use the current level of tools and the overwhelming gameness of the content, which tends to push people down the 'lots of guns, big explosions' route. As the authors point out, until tools make it as easy to make a cup of tea as it is to destroy a tank, machinima will remain a boys' playground. Yet there are reasons to be hopeful. The huge success of the storytelling options within *The Sims* points to a more accessible future; something that should be reinforced by Lionhead's *The Movies*.

Author: Neil Feineman
Publisher: Thames & Hudson
ISBN: 0 500 28561 6



GEEK CHIC

Was Galileo the very first nerd?

Have geeks finally inherited the earth and got their revenge, as suggested in this book's intro, or has the world just subsumed the more accessible elements of what has always been something of a caricature? Putting it another way, have geeks become chic or has chic become geek? While there's still a cloud of pro-gadget/antisocial haze associated with the term, more negative definitions such as nerd or the Japanese version, otaku, remain in society's lexicon of disapproval. Actually, these aren't issues Feineman is keen on addressing – instead, he's bashing through an atomised chronology of geek attitudes, culture, gadgets and heroes which starts with Galileo and Edison and, after brushing over Rubik, Elvis Costello and Love & Rockets, ends with Donnie Darko and the iPod.

It's all quite harmless and occasionally vaguely interesting and humorous as Feineman (who bizarrely is happy to confess he's no geek), knocks out opinionated definitions on things any self-respecting geek will know much more about. Collaborator Erwin van der Zande steps up to the plate to handle the geek games section, which again contains few surprises, except perhaps the inclusion of a screenshot of a mod in place of one of *Half-Life*. And it's such oddities, combined with the generally unreadable design, that makes Geek Chic something of a missed opportunity. But, as everyone knows, geeks don't read anyhow, so Feineman presumably has his eye on another audience entirely.

INCOMING

New games, and updates on games already on the radar

Star Wars: Empire At War

FORMAT: PC PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS



If *Force Commander* was the ambitious misstep before *Galactic Battlegrounds'* tentative retreat, then hopefully this will be an aptly epic counterstrike for the Westwood veterans at Petroglyph

Karakuri

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: TECMO



Charmingly entitled *Tokobot* in the US, *Project Zero* mastermind Keisuke Kikuchi's robot puzzler demands canny orchestration and combination of its droid minions to overcome enemies and traps

Raiden III

FORMAT: PS2 PUBLISHER: TAITO



Ten years on from PlayStation's *Raiden Project* – itself a pairing of games that originated five and two years prior to its release – 2005's furious arcade follow-up whips up a firestorm for PS2

Battles Of Prince Of Persia

FORMAT: DS PUBLISHER: UBISOFT



The Prince plays a card trick that knocks us all back, garnering points for Ubisoft by carving the tired tradition of the downsized console port into something unusual – a thoughtful interpretation

Tycoon City: New York

FORMAT: PC PUBLISHER: ATARI



There can't be many undertakings grander than setting about modelling the entirety of a city like New York, and yet that's precisely what Deep Red is attempting here. More next month

Rogue Galaxy

FORMAT: PS2, PSP PUBLISHER: SONY



Unperturbed by the stillbirth of *True Fantasy Live Online* and keen to capitalise on its *Dragon Quest VIII* reputation, Level 5 brings the two-and-a-half year development of its biggest RPG to a close

Resident Evil 5

FORMAT: 360, PS3 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM



The day of the sprinting dead begins as Chris Redfield takes to the sun-baked streets of South America, the series promising its most open, most strategically demanding instalment to date

Spinout

FORMAT: PS2, PSP PUBLISHER: ICON GAMES



It features neither monkey nor metal, but still there's plenty of *Marble Madness* in this spherical stunt racer from UK developer Icon. The game promises customisations and unlockables galore

Ridge Racer 6

FORMAT: 360 PUBLISHER: NAMCO



Microsoft continues to flesh out its next-gen release schedule with another Sony stalwart, title and screens suggesting this to be pure *Ridge* joyriding rather than another *R: Racing* spinout



INTERNET GAME OF THE MONTH

Façade

www.interactivestory.net

Currently making the rounds through academic circles as the latest breakthrough in AI and interactive storytelling, Façade is essentially Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf: The Game. What starts as an innocuous dinner invitation quickly disintegrates before your eyes into the possible dissolution of the hosts' marriage, through a series of snarky nitpicks, passive-aggressive martyrdom, and both parties unfairly pitting you against the other. How the evening – and the future of their relationship – fares depends solely on your textual input and, more entertainingly, awkward fumbling physical advances toward either of the pair.

While far from perfect, neither of the couple being able to appropriately respond to more complex queries or slung insults, there's little doubt that the experiment is a bold move forward in portraying the emotional lives of digital characters. With an estimated 20,000 lines of recorded dialogue (and thus a shockingly large download for a crudely rendered one-room scene), each playthrough can yield vastly different results.





The PS3 *Gundam* demo was the first for Sony's platform to offer a playable scenario, although it lacked the physics that should see the finished game making an impact





Level 5's PS2 RPG *Rogue Galaxy* has already made it to the top of many Japanese gamers' most-wanted lists

SOMETHING ABOUT Japan

The broadening horizon

Famitsu PS2 magazine's Koji Aizawa has seen the future, but what substance has he sifted from the hype?

While editing Famitsu PS2 and, for some time now, writing this column for Edge, I'm not generally short of work to keep me busy. But as everyone here in Japan gears up for the big things to come, and as the end of July filled up with conferences and events, it all swells to an enormous amount. July 21 saw the PlayStation Meeting 2005, July 25 saw the Xbox Summit, and July 30 was the date of the annual Square Enix Party.

I'd like to go over these events with you, starting with the PlayStation Meeting. To be honest, most of what was shown had already been presented at E3. We may have had a few additions (including a *Gundam* demo which, in a room full of Japanese people, created predictable excitement) but the PS3 should have been the most exciting part, yet very few elements of the presentation felt new. Sad, frankly, is how I felt. It was a similar situation for PSP. I mean, everyone expected Sony to launch a new colour (Ceramic White) along with the web browser, but was it really asking too much to anticipate more? Somehow, the most exciting machine at the meeting proved to be the PlayStation 2. *Rogue Galaxy*, Level 5's new RPG, came as a genuine shock – a beautiful title that offers a lot of potential with its high calibre of technical achievement, promising story and great graphics.

> Officially, the first Xbox sold 500,000 units in this country, and I believe the 360's target is closer to three million. It has at least enough appealing titles this time to achieve that, but of course, there are still questions to be asked

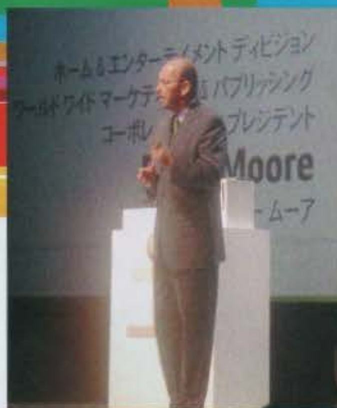
So now, let's turn to Xbox. This machine, let's face it, has been a failure in Japan, but its successor demonstrates Microsoft's real desire to change that. The conference was packed with people and particularly long – I was surprised to see so many Japanese developers getting involved. Namco, Konami, Koei – most of the big names were there, demonstrating their wares. Square Enix announced nothing beyond *FFXI*, but the most important aspect was the announcement of *Super Robot Taisen* – a game very popular among the Japanese. This was the most telling sign that Microsoft was serious in its desire to reach the Japanese audience. Officially, the first Xbox sold 500,000 units in this country, and I believe the 360's target is closer to three million. It has at least enough appealing titles this time to achieve that, but of course, there are still questions to be asked about the precise line-up for launch, the price of the machine and whether or not Microsoft will offer its developers serious support this time. Overall, however, I'm confident. I used to edit Famitsu Xbox, so there's still a place in my heart for this platform.

Finally, then, there's the Square Enix Party – an event geared specifically for the consumer that attracted around 50,000 people in two days. This was the first time that *FFXII* was playable since last year's E3, and in addition to seeing new videos of FFVII Advent Children and *Kingdom Hearts II*, we

As it chronicles its epic storyline through ongoing instalments, *Final Fantasy* continues to push technical boundaries, on PS2 and with CGI



Tetsuya Nomura's team at Square Enix is working hard to ensure that *Kingdom Hearts II*, scheduled for a December release in Japan, will reach the US market simultaneously



Microsoft's Peter Moore was on hand to hammer home his company's serious-about-Japan message

discovered that the *FFXII* release date has been officially set as March 16. At last, a definitive date for one of the most eagerly awaited PS2 titles of recent times – it will certainly be the last major title to be released on that platform. The game has changed a lot since last year's E3 demo, and I think the experience it's set to offer has become somewhat easier. I'm sure of one thing, however, which is that these three titles represent a great achievement in PS2 visuals, certainly the best you could expect to see from that hardware.

Now, you may be thinking that's all for this month, but Japan isn't the only place in Asia where games are presented – my mostly overbooked schedule took me to Shanghai and Taipei as well. In China, there was the third China Joy game show, while Taipei hosted its 2005 Summer Game Festival. Gaming in China focuses largely on online games, meaning the PC is king; in Taiwan, meanwhile, the market is more balanced. These two events clearly demonstrate the scale that videogaming in Asia has achieved now that it has expanded beyond Japan's borders. As both events were user-oriented, I was able to get a taste of just how many gamers exist outside of Japan – in both China and Taiwan, there really are a lot of them!

As the media, details and rumours about next-generation consoles flow into my office, we can only publish so much – we certainly can't publish everything! Not only as a professional but as a consumer myself, I'm happy to say I'm really excited about the shape of things to come.





Hype

The future of electronic entertainment

Edge's most wanted

Perfect Dark Zero



Not so much most wanted as most required – we're tantalisingly close to discovering what Rare has been able to achieve now that it's got to grips with Xbox 360 beta devkits.
360, MICROSOFT

Gears Of War



It's not just *Gears Of War*'s Unreal Engine 3-powered graphics that are ambitious – it's trying to tell a stimulating story, too. We think it'll be more successful with its visuals.
360, MICROSOFT

Game Boy Micro



After a GBA, an Afterburnered GBA, an SP and a DS, this shouldn't appeal, but it's hard to resist the lure of an *Advance Wars* so small you forget it's in your pocket.
NINTENDO

Hand Held Auto

Why GTA is the perfect PSP game



***Ridge Racers* may have stolen new PSP owners' hearts, but there was little about it that defined the distintive difference that the handheld offered. Can *GTA* make the PSP its own?**

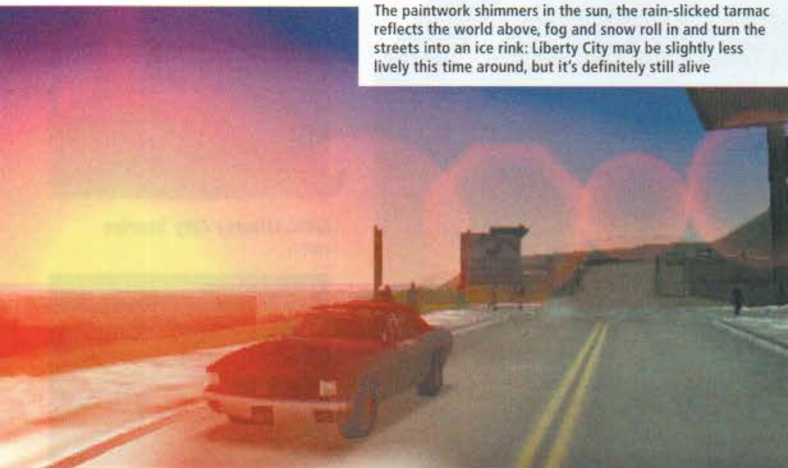
When Nintendo's DS was announced it was a conundrum: a spec sheet of spare parts and odd ideas. When Sony's PSP was announced it was a sure bet: the PS2 in your pocket no one could resist. More than a year on, the hardware has become a known quantity, each with its own pitfalls and pleasures. What's unexpected is that the software hasn't followed a similar arc.

Japanese developer Marvelous is working on handheld updates of a number of Taito classics (see p35), and has elected to call the DS versions of the games 'Revolution' and the PSP 'Evolution'. On first inspection it seems like a fairly valid precis. There's an instinctive understanding that the PSP offers extensions of existing console games, while the DS offers complete reinventions of old ideas. But it is, perhaps, an unfair assumption. The PSP also has its radical differences from a home console – portable, widescreen, wi-fi enabled, D-pad focused – so why don't we expect revolutions from the hardware?

Pursuit Force looks to stand as much chance as being the defining PSP title as any other – fresh, imaginative and geared aggressively towards portable play. *Liberty City Stories* stands for everything purists say ports shouldn't be: a facsimile of a home console game sidestepped on to a handheld with the hope that the Sleep function will take care of any useability problems. *Pursuit Force* is the kind of title that ought to define what playing games on a PSP feels like, but it won't. A warming-over of a four-year-old console game ought not to, but it will. *Liberty City Stories* will be a runaway success, and it will sell more PSPs than any other title.

And why not? Why shouldn't a console be defined by what people want to play on it, rather than what game developers know best suits it? A *GTAIII* sequel is more than most Rockstar North fans hoped for – a chance to relive the amazement and delight at the first time they played a game which felt like it was made just for them. And, in the end, doesn't it suit the hardware more perfectly than anything else could? The PSP: a handheld for people who know what they want. The DS: a handheld for people who want what they don't know.





The paintwork shimmers in the sun, the rain-slicked tarmac reflects the world above, fog and snow roll in and turn the streets into an ice rink: Liberty City may be slightly less lively this time around, but it's definitely still alive





FORMAT: **PSP**
PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR LEEDS**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER**

Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

The biggest game series in recent years can now be taken everywhere – but is it going anywhere?



Perhaps it was the subtitle that led us to expect something different this time around. We'll admit to our imaginations being overactive on the theme of *Grand Theft Auto* ever since *Vice City* skewed the disorganised crime series towards cultural satire and retro soundtracks. (A psychedelic San Andreas set in the countercultural scene of late-'60s California, anyone?) But *Liberty City Stories* – with that crucial plural – seemed to hint at some small-scale diversification within *GTAIII*'s urban playground, maybe featuring multiple lead characters, or spanning multiple eras. A sweetener to explain away the reduction in scale or freedom that we, wrongly as it turns out, thought was inevitable with the series' arrival on PSP.

Or perhaps it was the restless ambition displayed by the real *San Andreas*, a behemoth of a game that made almost too serious an attempt to push back every inward and outward boundary of the *GTA* formula, not to mention console gaming. The sheer size of it, the RPG character development, the harder edge to its content... Even though *Vice City* had demonstrated that *GTA* could be convincingly refreshed just by changing its clothes, here was a game built by people for whom that plainly wasn't enough. The same people who, a few years earlier, had changed gaming forever and made the PS2 their own by breathing life into a whole city in *GTAIII*. If anyone would have the vision and ambition to define Sony's PSP and resolve the conundrum of the home console in your pocket, surely they would. Wouldn't they?

Ambition, yes. Vision, no. On the current, admittedly limited showing, *Liberty City Stories* is no less and absolutely no more than a pre-*Andreas* PS2 *GTA* game transferred in full, without compromise or concession, to UMD. While it has overseen the project and installed the same storyline and script team that worked on previous *GTA*s, Rockstar North has handed development over to its sister studio in Leeds, formerly Mobius Entertainment, the miniaturisation specialist responsible for the PSP port of *Midnight Club 3* and GBA *Max Payne*. The Leeds team has successfully squeezed all three boroughs of Liberty City on to the sleek handheld. What's more, it's been done with scant loss of detail, and actually improved draw distance and added slicker visual effects compared to *GTAIII*, all conveyed via a solid framerate. It's an undeniable technical achievement.



The good citizens of Liberty City are just as vocal as ever, and just as dubious in their innocence. "I'm trying to cruise for pussy here!" one was heard to complain during our demonstration



Visually, *Liberty City Stories* can look a little rough-hewn, but no more so than its predecessors. An untidy air is almost an integral part of the series' charm









As ever, the radio kicks into life when you board a vehicle. The soundtrack is unconfirmed, but will fit the late-'90s setting. Audio may prove one of the more significant victims of the data compression required to fit the game on UMD

GTA fans will already know these streets by heart, and they'll find everything they expect on them, from Pay 'N' Sprays to branches of Ammu-Nation. There are minor changes throughout – buildings, businesses, maybe a shortcut or two – because the game is set three years before *GTAIII*, and like any real city, Liberty never stands still. The cast will be extensively familiar too, featuring characters from across the series, including the lead: Tony Cipriani of the Leone clan, voiced by Michael Madsen, as he was when on the other end of mission briefings in *GTAIII*. It's an interesting choice, not quite the blank slate the series has used with such success in the past. But a little of the old reckless rootlessness has been worked back in: as the game begins, Cipriani is returning to Liberty City after several years in hiding, having performed a risky execution for his boss Don Salvatore Leone.

Rockstar is promising a similar order of game to *GTAIII* in terms of the number of missions, accompanied by the usual diversions such as stunt and rampage challenges, and of course countless hours' further entertainment of players' own making. The streets' rich pickings for car thieves include old favourites like the Sentinel saloon; motorcycles have arrived from *Vice City*, but the prospect for any kind of air transport looks bleak. Control-wise, the vehicles career, bounce and smash with all the clownish grace and verve they ever did, while gunplay continues to amble towards respectability in its own sweet time, now allowing targets to be cycled through on the D-pad (or the analogue slider if you prefer to use the D-pad as the principal movement input). In general, *Liberty City Stories* seems closest to *Vice City* in terms of feature set and graphical polish.

On the current showing, Liberty City Stories is no less and no more than a pre-Andreas PS2 GTA game transferred in full, without compromise or concession, to UMD

A tweak here, some remixed content there: that's it. *Liberty City Stories* might be the most important game released this year – it could also be the most important game released in the PSP's entire lifetime – but it's a curiously unexciting prospect. It's as if, having discovered that they could transfer *GTA* wholesale to PSP, the two Rockstar studios didn't stop to consider whether or not they should. The viability of this kind of game on a handheld format is debatable – the unchanged mission and save structures will be even more unwieldy on the move, but then again, the casual mucking around *GTA* delivers like no other game knows no time limits. However, if you're prepared to believe that the full-blown *GTA* format sits just as naturally in your palm as on the TV screen, then isn't the decision not to renew it this time around – to literally retread old ground – insulting to players? Doesn't it show the same old veiled disregard for handheld gaming that the PSP was supposed to cure?

None of these worries can stop *Liberty City Stories* being one of the most riotously entertaining and best value packages on PSP this winter. It is *GTA*, after all. But there's a sense – just a suspicion, mind, and it must be remembered that in Rockstar's condensed PR cycle, two months is a long time – that something, some vital spark, has been lost. For the first time in its history, *Grand Theft Auto* is the same as it ever was.

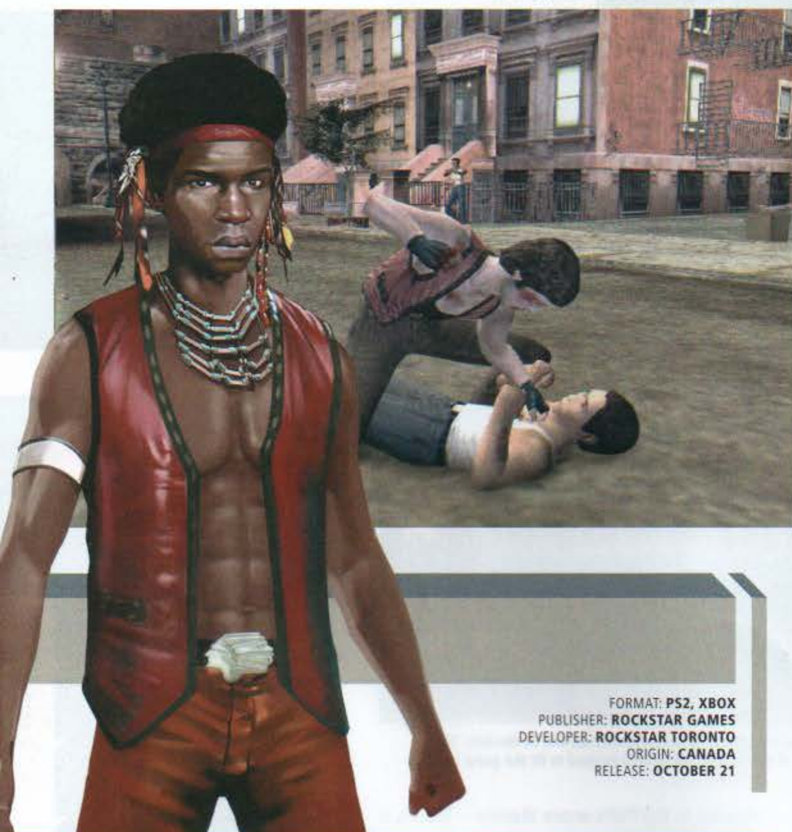




Un-Christian mission

The missions revealed so far confirm the Triads and the Sindaccos as rival gangs. The Triads torch a Leone warehouse, and you'll have to rescue a stash of cash from the ruins and shoot and drive your way out. Later, you receive a tip-off from a certain JD O'Toole, a Sindacco operative keen to switch sides, who runs Paulie's Revue Bar (later to become Sex Club 7). He informs you that the Sindaccos intend to destroy a Leone-owned casino, triggering a chaotic escalation of events – from chase to defence, Molotovs to truck-bombs – that's inimitably *GTA*. The greatest challenge, though, might be to babysit Don Salvatore's tiresome girlfriend Maria on a shopping trip: her nasal whinge is irritating enough, but her light fingers are the real trouble.

The seedy, neglected neighbourhoods in which much of the game takes place have been recreated with a strong sense of atmosphere, from Harlem's crumbling brick to Coney's neon and stained concrete





FORMAT: **PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR TORONTO**
ORIGIN: **CANADA**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER 21**

The Warriors

Rockstar dips into '70s gang culture and invites you to come out to play-ay

It's the perfect premise for a videogame. Walter Hill's 1979 movie follows the strutting street gang of its title as they brawl their way across 27 miles of New York City, from a disastrous conclave of gangs in the Bronx – at which popular leader Cyrus is shot, and the Warriors falsely accused of his shooting – to safety on their home turf of Coney Island. The clear-cut objective and pervasive threat, the linear trajectory conveniently broken into levels in the form of gang territories populated by thugs in outlandish, distinctive uniforms: it could have been tailor-made for the current roughhousing renaissance.

Rockstar Toronto, to its credit, saw the film as more than that, or rather less: the perfect end to a videogame. The events of the film occupy only the final third of this adaptation, as an extended set-piece climax to a more loosely structured and expansive exploration of these streets of rage. For most of its length you'll be based at the gang's hangout on Coney, a rundown base of operations where you can chat to your comrades, switch characters (Cleon, Swan and Ajax at the very least will be playable), and monitor the movements of rival gangs on the pirate radio station featured in the film.

Various missions – debt collection, in the example we were shown – will take you into enemy territory, accessed via a painstakingly recreated late-'70s subway map. (Touches like this, or the bold cutaways and kitsch logos that introduce a new gang, show all the presentational flair and eye for pulpy period detail of a Rockstar North title.) But you'll also be able to roam Coney Island freely whenever you choose, making your own fun in your own manor. Turf invasions by other gangs will need to be seen off during this time, but you can also busy yourself earning cash by looting shops or – and if you were bracing yourself for Rockstar's trademark headline-grabbing controversy, here it comes – mugging.

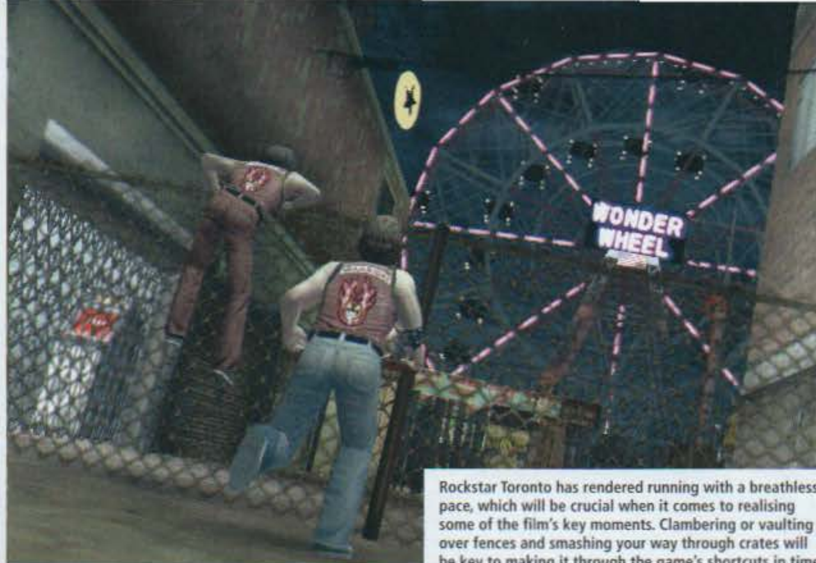
Though it was definitely no pussycat 25 years ago, The Warriors – as taut, punchy and threatening as it remains – is a bit tame by today's standards, and mannered almost to the point of being camp. It has all the laddish cult cachet and casual violence *GTA* made synonymous with the Rockstar brand, but little of the shock factor that so titillates the company's fans and enrages its critics.



When concentrating on spraying paint, lock picking or stealing a radio, it's best to ask your fellow Warriors to watch your back for fear of disruptive attacks. Or you could just command them to smash everything to pieces





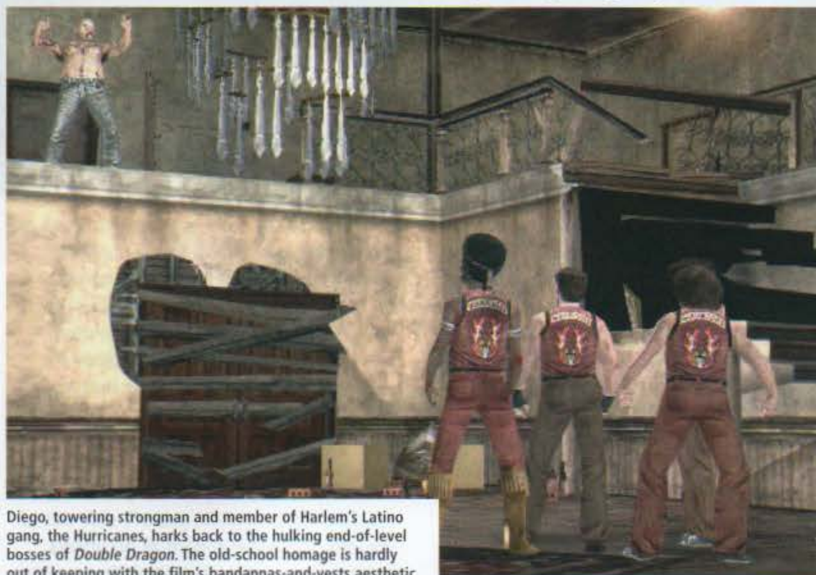


Rockstar Toronto has rendered running with a breathless pace, which will be crucial when it comes to realising some of the film's key moments. Clambering or vaulting over fences and smashing your way through crates will be key to making it through the game's shortcuts in time



The cast of characters is instantly recognisable, but voice acting has presented the developers with a dilemma: use the original recordings for remade cutscenes, or go with modern impersonators? Rockstar also won't yet confirm to what extent the film's seminal musical score will be used







Diego, towering strongman and member of Harlem's Latino gang, the Hurricanes, harks back to the hulking end-of-level bosses of *Double Dragon*. The old-school homage is hardly out of keeping with the film's bandannas-and-vests aesthetic



The inclusion of the ability to mug any passer-by could be read as a cynical attempt to bait the anti-videogame lobby. Especially so when you consider the exquisitely, tastelessly tactile method: you intimidate your mark by gently tweaking the right analogue stick until a vibration in the pad indicates that you've found their breaking point. The same might be said of the decision to make the health-restoring panacea of the Warriors' world a drug called Flash, consumed with an explicit animation and woozy, narcotic visual effect. Both these features, though, have a dark and subtle humour to them that restores an edge to the subject matter without betraying it.

At its heart, however, *The Warriors* is squarely focused on good old fisticuffs. Basic punch and kick moves are accompanied by combos, contextual attacks, reversals, dragging and throwing, snap attacks to assailants behind or to the side, tandem moves when you or one of your AI companions pins an enemy, and gruesome, bone-crunching finishing moves when your anger bar fills and the red mist of Rage Mode descends. Anything that can be picked up can be used as a weapon, and each Warrior has a distinctive fighting style, such as brawling, boxing or kung-fu. You can travel in a band of anything up to nine, and issue six 'War Chief' commands to soldiers: scatter, watch my back, wait, fight, move on and, most entertainingly, trash whatever you can find. Combat makes a meaty din, with liberal and characterful voice work gracing the thuds, slaps and clatters.

Rockstar has applied this licence with inimitable street-savvy, seeing in its charmingly dated looks, lawless cool and urban degeneration a fashionably distressed veneer

While steering clear of the roleplaying overtones of Capcom's *Beat Down* (see p90), Rockstar Toronto is certainly keen to vary the pace of this latter-day beat 'em up. Mission objectives will often take the emphasis off scrapping with everyone you see, and place it instead on stealth or speed, bringing the ability to create distractions or vault obstacles respectively into play. The general running and wrecking will be liberally punctuated with microgame asides that ask for a different kind of dexterity: mugging is one example, graffiti another (see 'Dogged tagging'); you might also be asked to steal a car radio by unscrewing it with a twirl of the analogue stick, or pick a lock with carefully timed button presses. Fine execution of these, as well as fight moves, will earn style bonuses for your score, though the purpose of that score tally is still unknown.

Rockstar has applied this licence with inimitable street-savvy, seeing in its charmingly dated looks, lawless cool and urban degeneration a fashionably distressed veneer for some unreconstructed videogame action. Like so few games before it, *Wipeout* being perhaps most notable, *The Warriors* brings gaming's lifestyle-conscious present and its secret, sweat-drenched past together in perfect harmony. Its release, coinciding with a director's cut DVD, is well timed, but whether *The Warriors* can reach more than its niche markets – and whether there really is enough gaming meat in its knuckle sandwich – it has yet to prove. 

Dogged tagging

When on a rival gang's turf, you'll naturally see its colours painted around, and just as naturally be encouraged to overlay them with a Warriors 'W' to mark your presence. The game will set tagging targets for each area that, if met, will reward the player, perhaps with a new weapon or a bonus objective. Graffiti is created even more intricately and literally than in the original *Jet Set Radio*: for a fast tag you'll need to draw the W shape with the analogue stick, without going outside set lines, and larger murals will require you trace out ever more complex shapes. Paint, however, is limited, so like the Flash drug, you'll need to buy it, steal it, or beat it out of your opponents.







Bigbig has filled the PSP's peripheral expanse of screen with colourful, busy and detailed environments, and screenshots don't do them justice. A Richard Jacques score complements their cinematic sweep







It's possible to pick which part of a vehicle to jump to; hit the roof of a truck and you'll have to make your way forward while the driver tries to shake you off. Villains are just as athletic, so be ready to return the favour

FORMAT: **PSP**
PUBLISHER: **SCEE**
DEVELOPER: **BIGBIG**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **Q4**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E151**

Pursuit Force

Bigbig's high-concept stunt chaser takes a leap of faith on to PSP, and hits the ground driving

For videogame developers to take inspiration from a film is commonplace, but basing your creation around just one scene shows an uncommon singularity of purpose. While Bigbig is happy to cite everything from The Godfather to Beverly Hills Cop as influences on its breakneck PSP debut *Pursuit Force*, it really just wants to recreate one thing: Indiana Jones leaping, dangling and wrestling his way to the controls of the Nazi truck in Raiders Of The Lost Ark.

Enable jumping between and fighting for control of any vehicle, without dropping the pace, in a high-speed chase game: it's as blunt and tall an order as those issued by the irascible police chief to the maverick star officer of Pursuit Force, an agency set up to clear the motorised gangs out of a lawless US state. The system, three months in the making, is deceptively simple and seamless, achieved with a single button press when an icon pops up showing which vehicle is in range.

Civilian cars are instantly commandeered, but once on an enemy vehicle you'll need to resist attempts to shake you off, slide out of the way of gunfire, and kill all occupants before you can assume control. You can also ram and shoot your targets, but these tactics need more balancing to compete with the dynamic spectacle and tactical advantage of a jump. Each enemy ride yields a new weapon, whose varying strengths (SMG for long-distance takedowns, shotgun for onboard altercations) give the relentless action strategic width, if not depth.

At this stage, it's hard to tell how important hopping between vehicles for their handling, armour and weight properties will be, but varying road surfaces and damage will likely keep you jumping even if your choice of transport doesn't. For all the admirable concentration on its big idea, Bigbig is determined to offer variety and surprise within each five-minute mission, and to that end some sections will put you in a speedboat, behind a helicopter-mounted minigun and even on your own two feet for some thirdperson duck-and-cover firefights that currently punctuate the pace a little too heavily.

Bigbig, a Warwickshire-based satellite of *WRC* developer Evolution and a team of 20-odd formed around a core of ex-Codemasters employees, is staffed with racing-game experts, but also with keen students of classic game design. They mention *R-Type*'s wave patterns immediately after the obvious *Chase HQ* and long before they get to *GTA*. With *Pursuit Force* they're aiming to find an original but comfortable fusion of gaming staples old and new, of driving and shooting, of arcade immediacy and widescreen drama. In the current vacuum, this template stands as good a chance as any of defining what makes a PSP game a PSP game.



Metering out justice

There's a strong whiff of *Burnout*'s exhaust around *Pursuit Force*, from its brash looks and handling to the inclusion of a power-up meter. But where *Burnout*'s boost gauge rewarded lawlessness with speed, *Pursuit Force*'s endearingly silly Justice Meter rewards lawfulness – in the loose terms of preserving civilian lives, and ending criminal ones – with slowness. The slow-mo Justice Jump allows you to shoot the villains out of a car from mid-air in one of the most gratuitous and gratifying bullet-timeouts yet seen. Adding health regeneration to your powers feels a little like an afterthought, but it does help focus on the player's real worst enemy: the stringent time limits.



Each of the game's gangs has its own distinctive style of transportation: the Capelli mobsters (above) are in liveried classics, the Warlord mercenaries drive military hardware, the Killer66 yakuza favour modified imports, and so on



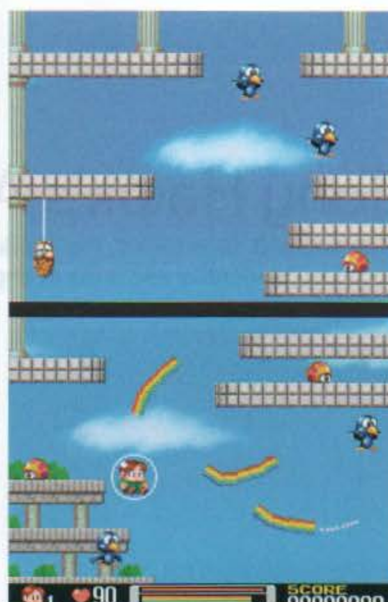




Pursuit Force's 'heligun' sections are straightforwardly ballistic interludes that can be dropped into the middle of a level without warning. With weaving traffic and an unsteady viewpoint, it becomes a challenge to avoid civilian carnage




Rainbow Islands Revolution (right) is still at a very early stage, but the fundamental pleasure of drawing your own rainbows seems likely to survive whatever graphical tweaks it





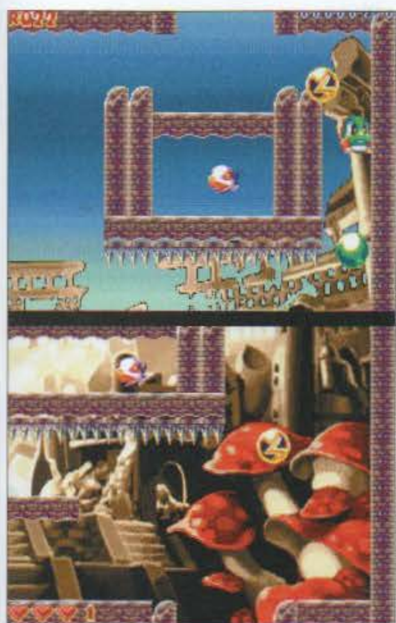
Taito Revolution and Evolution



FORMAT: **DS, PSP**
PUBLISHER: **RISING STAR**
DEVELOPER: **MARVELOUS**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **TBA**

Can yet another series of Taito updates succeed in invading your personal space?

PSP emulation is already proving that old games sit surprisingly well on the new generation of handhelds. But what happens if, instead of emulating, you try to rejuvenate? That's what Marvelous (best known for *Harvest Moon*) is attempting to do with its *Evolution* and *Revolution* series. Working through some of the jewels in Taito's crown – *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* are announced so far – it's aiming to produce two new versions of each: one shaped around the unique capabilities of the DS, one catering to the ambition and sophistication of the PSP.

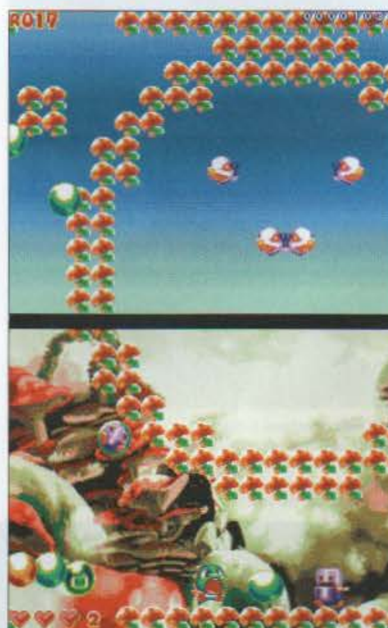

Special bubbles, such as fire, water and electricity, make a comeback – as does a new invention which produces a ghost replica of your character on the opposite screen

Games of this era are famously tricky to redo – often the best-case scenario is simply repeating the success of the past, and the worst is entirely botching the appeal of the original in the modernisation attempt. There's something about the DS and PSP, however, that might mean this project proves successful. *Rainbow Islands* best represents the direction the DS games – the *Revolution* titles – are taking. Based on the classic gameplay, it takes the obvious step of letting you draw the rainbows with the stylus. Bubby can similarly be tugged around, and the basic pattern of draw-and-drop is amplified with rainbow loops which allow enemies to be dragged into place for setting up the best combos, and triangular rainbow traps, which capture all enemies which touch them. Despite the code being pre-alpha, there's already clear satisfaction and fluidity in the control scheme.

Flying the flag for the PSP titles – the *Evolutions* – is *Bubble Bobble*. At an even earlier stage of development, it's currently represented as a set of astonishingly inventive ideas. Instead of taking place on a flat plane, each level is set at an angle. It takes some explaining on paper, but imagine taking a child's book – one with a few, thick cardboard pages – and opening it into a full circle, so that back and front covers touch. The game will then play out in the traditional 2D way on each 'page' but the action will move from one to the next as the entire structure slowly revolves. It's designed to make the best use of the PSP's widescreen dimensions while staying true to the game's 2D roots, but it may be worth waiting for screenshots before trying to get your head around it.

But if these novelties make your heart sink, it's worth bearing in mind that each game will contain a devotedly accurate port of the original (with the exception of the DS's *Rainbow Islands*). It's a bold step by Marvelous – a company with no real arcade experience taking on some of the most revered of classic titles – but the firm's attitude seems to match reverence with ruthless inventiveness. And, if it pulls it off, there will be something strangely fitting about these games being reborn on the machines which have themselves reinvented handheld gaming.




There's no doubt that *Bubble Bobble Revolution* packs a vibrant punch, but there is a little concern at this stage that such densely colourful backdrops detract from the gaming experience rather than simply enhancing it



Pocket Invaders

The first in Marvelous' series – *Space Invaders Revolution* – is already out on the DS, and follows in the footsteps of any number of underwhelming *Space Invaders* updates. The proposed PSP version, however, sounds simply extraordinary. Taking cues from *Tempest* and *Star Fox* as well as being inspired by a substantial array of post-graduate maths, the game will see your ship scroll from side to side on a long, curving loop. There are still shields, and the invaders – continually spawned by orbiting UFOs – still march towards you in measured steps, but the tone and style of the game will be radically changed. It may be a real revolution, or it may be another disastrous and unnecessary reinvention, but it's hard not to be encouraged by the freshness of the ideas.

FORMAT: **360, GC, PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **NEVERSOFT**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **AUTUMN 2005**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E151**

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

Detoxed and determined, the Hawk franchise reclaims its identity and quits acting like a Jackass





Its look isn't likely to set the world aflame, but *Wasteland* has nonetheless hoisted its own bar up a few notches. Textures aren't as coarse or murky as expected, the character models curvier with fewer jutting angles



BMX riding features extensively in *Wasteland*, a new engine (not that of the *Matt Hoffman* series) sharing the limelight with an optimised skating model. The removal of gimmickry allows both modes of play to flourish, and says much for the wisdom of Neversoft's approach

It's not often that videogame boxart accurately reflects videogame content, with gun'n'gurn caricature overriding legitimate character on nine out of ten occasions. *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*, however, couldn't have provided a more accurate profile of itself than when it paired off the listless Hawk with the supremely conceited Bam Margera, the former reduced to an emotionless shell by the thought of the latter reshaping his meandering franchise with ill-advised pratfalls and smug bravado.

Knowingly staged as it was, this juxtaposition of nu-Hawk and old was still a telling exclamation from a personality in crisis. Any justification of this series' continued development from here, Neversoft will have realised, must be a differing, defining moment with a shining trick up its sleeve – one brilliant enough to convince the cynics that the fans' wavering support has finally led to somewhere worthy of the expense. *Wasteland* claims to have that device in a single, sprawling environment with suitably liberal sandbox rules, and evidence suggests enough self discipline in its outlook to facilitate a finest hour.

Foremost in the *Wasteland* manifesto is the abolition of the Jackass ideology, Neversoft's efforts wisely refocused on the great *Pro Skater* learning curve that, to this day, precious few could truthfully say they've topped. All the conversations and challenges we've encountered have thus far religiously adhered to your mastery of the board (or, as it happens, the bike), the game's reward being once again inherent in the enactment of its craft and not some misguided cutscene that follows. Offering localised clothing and accessories, a slowly evolving environment, a Classic mode for the staunch traditionalists and a typically bounteous soundtrack, *Wasteland*'s blueprint is, by the series' recent standards, as pure as the driven snow.



Wasteland's action moves gradually through a night-and-day cycle, certainly benefiting the game's open-ended approach. The division of its world into partially segregated locales, however, threatens to significantly undermine the illusion of a single expansive playground

The game's quirkiness still exists (there must be some in a street sports title, after all), but has been wisely confined to its level-changing events and more cinematic tricks, Neversoft's alterations proving as limited in number as they are decisive. *Hawk*, it seems, has reacquired a genuine vision of its ultimate self. While first-time Xbox Live support, motion-captured cutscenes and an added inventory of old-school tricks exemplify this, it's the 'free-roaming' Los Angeles that not only provides *Wasteland* with its most angelic asset, but gives us our sole cause for concern.

The clue is in those inverted commas – just how freely can you roam Hawk's new domain? Certainly, the city's zones incorporate a fair few landmarks – the Capitol Records building, Mann's Chinese Theatre, Santa Monica and so on, but it's that word 'zones' that's problematic. Our playtest suggested no overarching map, which in itself suggests division between one area and another. As much as we'd have loved to skate from one sun-drenched LA region to the next, it was somewhat disappointing to find that, in the demoed districts at least, part of that journey occupied a sparsely decorated underground tunnel, conveniently closing the curtain while telltale loading took place. We wait and hope, then, for a more thorough test to reveal that Neversoft's American dream can, in this crucial and ambitious regard, finally be fulfilled.



Early snapshots of *Wasteland* 360 don't quite drown you in depth with the powerhouse conviction you'd expect, but then *Hawk*'s traversal of the generations it's seen has always been more a shuffle than a stride. Considering the ambition of this instalment, it's hard to see Neversoft finding time to substantially upgrade anything beyond the texture resolution, framerate and draw distance



Primo double

Without suggesting that the previous handheld versions of the *Hawk* games have been in any way lacking, the DS rendition of *THAW* looks set to provide an interesting departure from Vicarious Visions' usual fare. Reduced and reinterpreted as a cel-shaded equivalent of the home console title, this specifically engineered version handles surprisingly well via the DS D-pad and buttons, while its framerate remains unfalteringly smooth, even at an early stage of development. It remains to be seen, though, whether the intricate paths of grindable edges and surfaces can be retained.



As murky as some of them can be, *Conflict*'s new engine breathes a great deal of life into the pungent heat and evocative details of its early environments. Later levels offer crisper, but similarly rich urban surroundings





The tried-and-tested *Conflict* technique of sending in a single man to pave the way for the remaining team is still a winning one, the overhauled control system making it easy to coordinate assaults without fear of AI slip-ups

Conflict: Global Storm

Leaving terror for the real-world headlines, Pivotal's military intelligence cooks up its latest, wisest Storm

FORMAT: **PC, PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **EIDOS**
DEVELOPER: **PIVOTAL GAMES**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **SEPTEMBER 30**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E147**

If this fourth *Conflict*'s recent titular adjustment tells us something, it's that one of the modern military genre's most individual units still reports to the politicians when circumstances demand. Likewise, its Americanised SAS characters (retrieved from the *Desert Storm* titles to instil a sense of familiarity but then drafted, for the usual marketing reasons, into the wrong army) serve as a reminder of Pivotal's ongoing struggle with the conventions and jingoism of this particular gaming territory.

Global Storm, however, is still a fine ambassador for a developer that knows when to retreat from a hostile battleground (art having imitated life in the case of its ill-advised Vietnamese campaign) and remains regimented in its pursuit of an ever-improving *Conflict* experience. The result is a game that wisely scavenges elements from older titles while beating more ambitious paths elsewhere. A new engine has completely replaced the RenderWare of old, while an AI overhaul, improved manoeuvring system and a redesigned interface complete the upgraded loadout.

Pivotal is keen to stress the manner in which its new enemies ape the actions of real-life multiplayer opponents: dashing rather than dawdling, flanking rather than charging and seeking cover wherever possible – claims that are reassuringly upheld once the game's improvised set-pieces begin to play out.

As they're systematically employed throughout its worldwide theatre of missions, the game's other changes integrate smoothly into a mix that, having already achieved a degree of complexity that works satisfyingly across both PC and console formats, continues to raise its level of control and opportunity. The new vaulting moves certainly complement the game's denser architectural layout, while streamlined systems such as weapon selection and grenade tossing (now falling on the precise target of the reticule) genuinely help bring tactics to the fore without fumbling them with unrealistic moments of incompetence. In a genre where it's easy to miss the mark and even easier to appear outmoded, *Conflict* should represent a timely recapturing of its developer's aim.





While its grenade-throwing has been simplified to the point where a successful lob is inevitable, incoming grenades have an accordingly odd habit of landing with pinpoint precision right in front of your face or feet – something it'd be nice to see addressed, if only for believability

Ultimate Spider-Man

Treyarch aims high with its latest uninhibited fling, in a style that makes perfect Spider-sense



FORMAT: **GC, PC, PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **TREYARCH (PC PORT BY BEENOX)**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER 14**

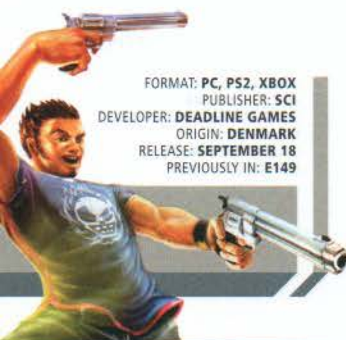
As foolish as declarations of perfection are in a creative medium, it's hard to begrudge Treyarch for suggesting that its latest *Spider-Man* is to be the series' best. Having zipped the licence to some heights with its adaptation of Spider-Man 2, the developer's handling of Brian Michael Bendis' Ultimate series has shown few signs thus far of undermining the precipitous playground that was introduced last year. Though that game's duration fell somewhat short of rivalling its verticality, its freeform control system and openness placed more of its character's strengths into gamers' hands than anyone had cause to expect. Given the chance to spin a new and stylistically different story, the developer is now promising more than just a busier timetable for its high-flying hero.

The game's most striking asset remains its visual style. Activision doggedly insists that its game employs '3D comic inking' rather than cel-shading, but regardless, *Ultimate*'s cinematics continue to make the technique their own, slickly penning their story as a virtual comic book in which characters literally leap from the page. It honours the traditional layout of panels and letters, but at the same time readily subverts it with fluidity and flair. Never are these better employed than when they're spliced seamlessly into the game's action, cutting loose that flagging dead weight of static character models spouting reams of subtitled dialogue.

Elsewhere, *Ultimate* is clearly enjoying its distance from the constrictive world of Hollywood, littering its missions with a team of Marvel all-stars to truly upstage the few that turned out last time. Though the set-pieces and challenges in which they partake are no less arcadey and procedural than the series is accustomed to, they're also no less competently engineered. There are still issues with the game overall, but at this juncture they're largely aesthetic – the sandbox New York, for example, feeling less evocative than before due to its purposefully smaller palette. There's little to suggest, however, that come the final build, Treyarch won't have swung past this and other split hairs to reach a lofty vantage point over today's superhero action genre.



The introduction of Venom as a second playable character is the game's most profound casting choice, his diametrically opposed agenda to Spidey's setting up some dramatic narrative intersections while providing an explosive move-set replete with car-tossing and vampiric, energy-restoring assaults on passers-by



FORMAT: **PC, PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **SCI**
DEVELOPER: **DEADLINE GAMES**
ORIGIN: **DENMARK**
RELEASE: **SEPTEMBER 18**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E149**

Total Overdose

SCi's Mex Payne strikes its target squarely between the eyes, and shows no sign of ending the combo there







Thrills in this Rodriguez -inspired shoot 'em up come approximately once every two seconds thanks to the game's onslaught of bonuses, multipliers, fireworks and riotous power-ups

You can't fully enjoy a game about guns, gringos, chickens and hats without anticipating a split-second end to the laughs once the curiosity expires. But if a trashy thirdperson actioner like *Total Overdose* could, five issues ago, ride its stereotype (and what a glorious example of one it's found) to the effect that it did with so little sign of waning, perhaps another of its surprises might be to steer a path around some of the genre's lazier conventions and pitfalls. So went the fantasy, and so, to a degree, goes the reality.

Determining the longevity of *Overdose*'s appeal still isn't easy, so deep are the belly laughs incurred by playing that surely they can't last forever. But the sheer competence and class with which the game honours its premise and acknowledges its lifespan is inspirational, like that of a cornered desperado cocking twin pistols for a gutsy last dance. You could brand the game an east/west clash between *Max Payne* and *Gungrave*, but in doing so you'd overlook its suite of minor innovations that, though they won't change the world, might just inspire a contemplative pause or two in the development community.

Overdose doesn't just appreciate the need for playground mechanics in the modern action genre, it wants to maximise your capacity for enjoying them. Driving a vehicle, for example, while leaning from its door and scoring headshots with a sidearm is an impressive enough task to place in the player's hands, but to then extend that to leaping out and returning, in mid air, to the game's regular fighting system against the backdrop of the ensuing explosion is a terrific achievement when coupled to such logical controls. For a game that wears its dislike of moderation on its sleeve to conduct itself with such finesse is, to say the least, a pleasant surprise, even if the Mexican revolution it achieves ultimately remains confined to the action genre's limited domain.





The cream of *Overdose*'s missions swamp their otherwise simple objectives with hordes of enraged locals, jumping from doorways and vehicles to destroy the trespassing gringo. Those with a passion for punching midgets in the groin before blasting them skyward are especially spoilt



FORMAT: **XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE (MONTREAL)**
ORIGIN: **CANADA**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E151**

Far Cry: Instincts

One of the last pre-360 blockbusters achieves the seemingly impossible task of making the Xbox look small

Dual-wielding feels less awkward when just pistols are involved, but wrenching mounted guns from their fixtures before carrying them into battle is more fun



Were Ubisoft Montreal's attempt to jam the far-flung reaches of *Far Cry* into the (how quickly times change) humble Xbox to prove a disaster, it would at least stand as a memorable instance of wild ambition being applied to the seemingly impossible. With the final build practically on our doorstep, it proves surprisingly difficult to determine just how good this will be.

Much looks provisionally promising, and just as much serves to uphold the grand claims made of this title back in its earlier days. The reliable talent of Montreal's artists has fashioned a convincing embellishment of the game's founding concept: underwater swimming, for instance, is now an entirely different and more immersive experience, while the new trap mechanic is like a revisiting of *Spy Vs Spy* – the coiling of barbed tree branches beside paths invoking its air of mischief to a tee.

The problem is that, for all the success with which the original game's lush terrain, epic draw distance and open environments have been retained and even bettered, key elements such as enemy AI have yet to be seen fully. At least we hope that's the case after witnessing the idiocy of this build's NPCs. Considering how crucially important it is to lock down a steady framerate with all of the game's resource-intensive tasks in operation, final judgements will have to stay on hold until a review. Only then can this grand repackaging (its map editor continuing to impress) of an already epic game be judged. Artistically, *Instincts* is relentlessly top notch, so here's hoping that its beauty doesn't have it chugging like a beast.



Instincts convincingly employs overbright to punish the eyes as the baking sun is bounced from white sands

Horse-riding appears to have been relegated to an on-rails shooting gallery instead of a vehicle to be called upon within levels, but the urgent pace is still entertaining as you fend off ghoulish riders and an early appearance from the game's chief villain







Darkwatch

Despite its early promise, this vampire gunslinging yarn may have been left out in the sun too long

It's been a long development trail for High Moon's horror-western FPS, and that much is evident in a score of careful details, from the folksy jangle of gunslinger Jericho Cross's spurs to the sepia-and-brimstone haze that has settled on its warped west. But on lengthier play it's also evident in less complimentary aspects, such as the multiplayer levels – the first to be created – apparently possessing more character than the singleplayer game's barren, tunnelled haunts, and the storyline opening with such clumsy, scattershot delivery as to risk filling the game's mythos with holes.

Other aspects, disappointingly, don't seem to have blossomed in that long development time. Evidence of the reputation-based branching that was to steer progress is still scarce, other than binary moral dilemmas to boost Cross's good or evil vampiric powers – but *Darkwatch*'s most crucial element, the shootouts, remain as solid and vicious as on its first showing. The restless dead disintegrate messily under gunfire or a savage stock-whip, with the latter playing a vital role in putting a skull-splintering halt to their unflinching charges. Regardless of the location-specific damage, being quick on the trigger rather than sharp with your shooting is the priority, save for breaks in the mob rushes to trade rifle rounds with distant snipers.

Enemy design remains a highlight, from the fittingly frontier-Gothic banshees to the hulking Banditos, with their memorable ability to shrug off the results of the headshots that reliably drop their undead kin





Dynamite can be flung, though usually all but common enemies will scatter. Using explosive crossbow bolts on enemies can provide a fatal surprise as they run at you

Enemies have a supernatural agility that allows them to lope into striking distance with alarming speed, but Cross has his own in the form of a vampiric double-jump, able to spring from the dust to a saloon balcony or cross a ravine in a lazily graceful arc. It's a pleasing mechanic, made even more so by the addition of a cancel that returns him forcefully to earth should you leap into a crossfire or overshoot your target. Despite the responsive controls' best efforts, attempting airborne kills in passing may find even the most adept console shooter players pining for mouselook: it's likely to be the defining skill in the game's deathmatch.

That deathmatch looks well stocked, but we can't help but think most interest in *Darkwatch* won't have been stoked by its multiplayer prospects. While the singleplayer game's enclosed bullpen encounters are at first exhilarating, they already show signs of overstaying their welcome – sometimes sprung too quickly to give you much chance of survival, other times so extended that the next wave's arrival draws a sigh of resignation, not a thrill of panic.

Darkwatch is a capable FPS – the developer's intention, after all – but if the promising setting continues to go underused, what should have been a double-barrelled roar will be just another gunshot in an already packed arena.

FORMAT: **PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT (UK), CAPCOM (US)**
DEVELOPER: **HIGH MOON STUDIOS**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **AUTUMN 2005**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E135, E151**



Pistol power

Darkwatch continues *Halo*'s rehabilitation of the initial pistol as a weapon to be feared rather than holstered at the earliest opportunity.

The Redeemer's single-shot accuracy makes it a handy sniping standby should no rifle be at hand, and in close quarters it's possible to fan the hammer for rapid fire, producing a devastating attack if you can restrain its upward recoil. As with all of *Darkwatch*'s weapons, the sickle-bladed grip provides a grisly coup de grace.



Jericho's two freely usable vampire powers are his double-jump and 'blood vision', which highlights enemies and items while providing a slight zoom effect useful for sniping – though the dedicated sniper rifle has its own old-fashioned telescopic sight

FORMAT: **PS2**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **GENKI**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **SEPTEMBER 22 (JAPAN)**
TBA (UK)

SLAI: Steel Lancer Arena International

Once the Xbox's answer to From's mech empire, the online sequel to Phantom Crash now shifts into direct competition







Both firstperson and thirdperson views are available to *SLAI* contestants, each offering a neat and polished HUD through which to dart about its localised arenas. The frenetic action both before and across the display seldom overruns your capacity for effective response

Genki's move from Xbox to PS2 has spawned a raft of potential improvements and compromises that play on the minds of those anticipating its games. Though titles such as *J-Pheonix* and *Phantom Crash* essentially played second fiddle to their From inspirations, the latter – a solid mech dueller with definite appeal – earned itself enough admirers to warrant a successor. With the title having made the unpredictable jump to PS2, the obvious boon for the new audience is that they're now looking at an alternative online mech title to the recent *Front Mission Online* – one that promises up to eight players during networked battles while maintaining its breezy and accessible mechanic.

While *Armored Core* simply eclipses Genki's efforts in terms of its cathedral of customisation options and sheer life experience, *SLAI* hasn't stood still to let the peer pressure break its resolve. This is an upsized experience that, for those taken by its arcade trappings, will healthily pass the time. Many of the game's vehicle designs remain similar to those of *Crash*, as do eccentric artistic traits such as its static talking animal heads and eclectic soundtrack. The game's environments continue to gain character, colouring in their previously flat surfaces with evocative decals, even if their overall design still feels unconvincing.



If technical concessions have been made during the move from Xbox to PS2, then Genki has done well to mask them with a game that, in both its frontend navigation and in-game rumbles, stands head and shoulders above predecessor *Phantom Crash*. Early impressions suggest a pre and post-match rundown that features less chat than before, though plenty of character still trickles through

Ultimately, much of *SLAI* points to a solid online experience. Controls are a responsive complement to the DualShock and the arrangement of shoulder buttons has provided opportune improvement to the handling. The optic camouflage that provided such a sound strategic twist to *Crash* has also translated well to PS2, the bending of light again providing fleeting clues as to the whereabouts of concealed opponents to no diminished effect.

Though its platform change is set to stand it between giants, *SLAI* at least looks certain to find itself a place.

FORMAT: **PC**
PUBLISHER: **NCSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **NETDEVIL**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **Q4**

Auto Assault

After paving over dungeons and dragons to build the City Of Heroes, NCSoft is taking the MMO on the road

The tricks and trims system allows for cosmetic customisation of your vehicle, if you have the stencils and materials required, that is; it's vital for gaining a sense of identity, your car being your main manifestation on the battlefield

NCSoft is continuing its push for a bigger slice of western subscription-gaming markets with this unlikely marriage of two gaming staples: post-apocalyptic vehicle combat and the MMORPG. In *Auto Assault*, players choose between three warring races – Humans, Mutants, and Biomeks – and four class types: frontline soldiers, support units, commander units and special ops agents. Each drives a vehicle styled to match, but there are humanoid avatars too for city life.



Combat is as direct, fast-paced and destructive as a deathmatch game, with the RPG dice-rolling happening entirely in the background. An impressive predictive physics engine brings destructible environments to the MMO space for the first time, and in order to encourage typically conservative MMO players to get into the spirit, NetDevil has included an experience bonus for rapid multiple kills. The game is geared towards solo play – even the adaptive private instances should be beatable, if tough, alone. The majority of adventuring will happen within each race's secure territory, with PvP combat taking place in the disputed central zone, on set raid missions into enemy territory, or in sporting arenas which allow players from different servers to take part.

The game's showstopping feature is Hazard mode – a timed superpower that might transform your vehicle into an energy field or a giant robot, depending on race – but it's the extremely open-ended item and crafting system that seems to have the most potential. Looted items have randomly generated stats, and any one can be reverse-engineered and (with a degree of risk) experimented on by players to create and sell their own specific hybrids.

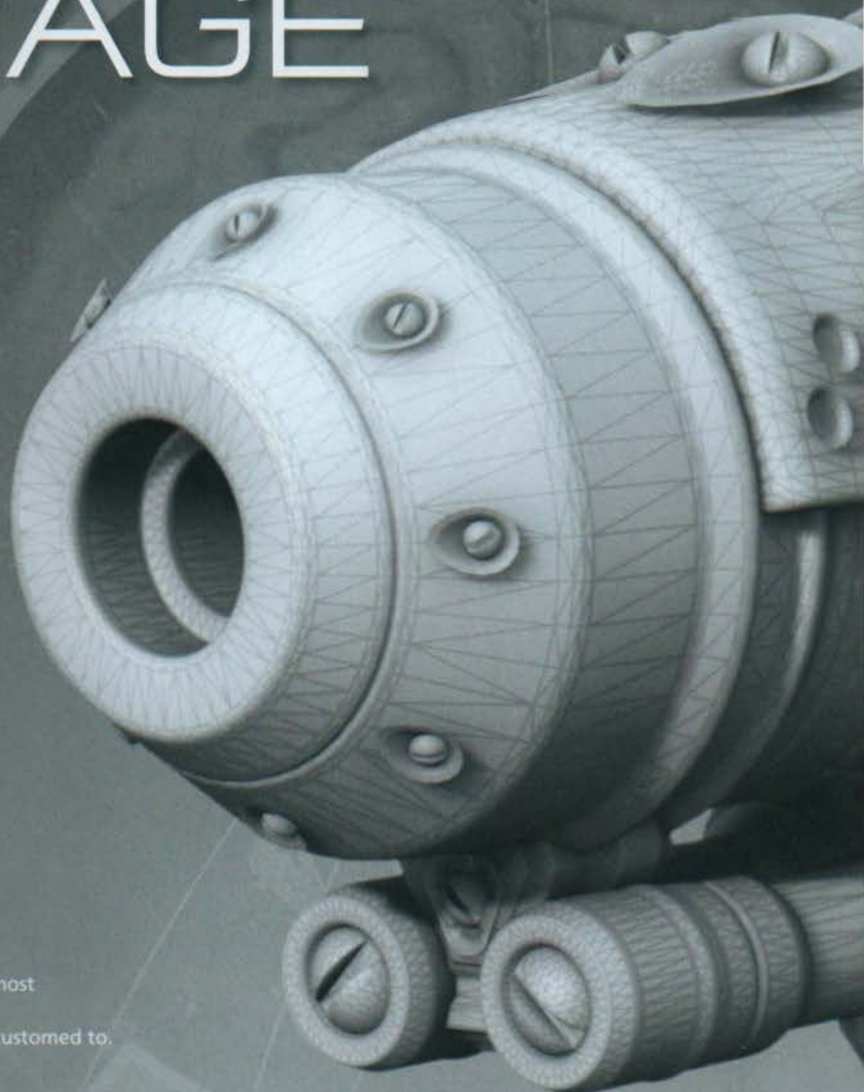


The three races' automotive tastes reflect their philosophies: Humans drive sleek, stylised, high-tech vehicles, Biomeks favour ruggedness and function over aesthetics, while Mutants prefer organic designs

The grimy environments, weak art direction and fussy UI make *Auto Assault* an unattractive prospect on the surface, and there are deeper concerns too, not least how effective cooperative party play will be, considering how messy and confusing the action can get when playing solo. But it remains a welcome change of gear for the MMO scene that could just drive it into new territory.

SQUAD DAMAGE

Can the new Quake, rendered for the first time by another game's engine, recapture the flag for the fathers of the firstperson shooter?

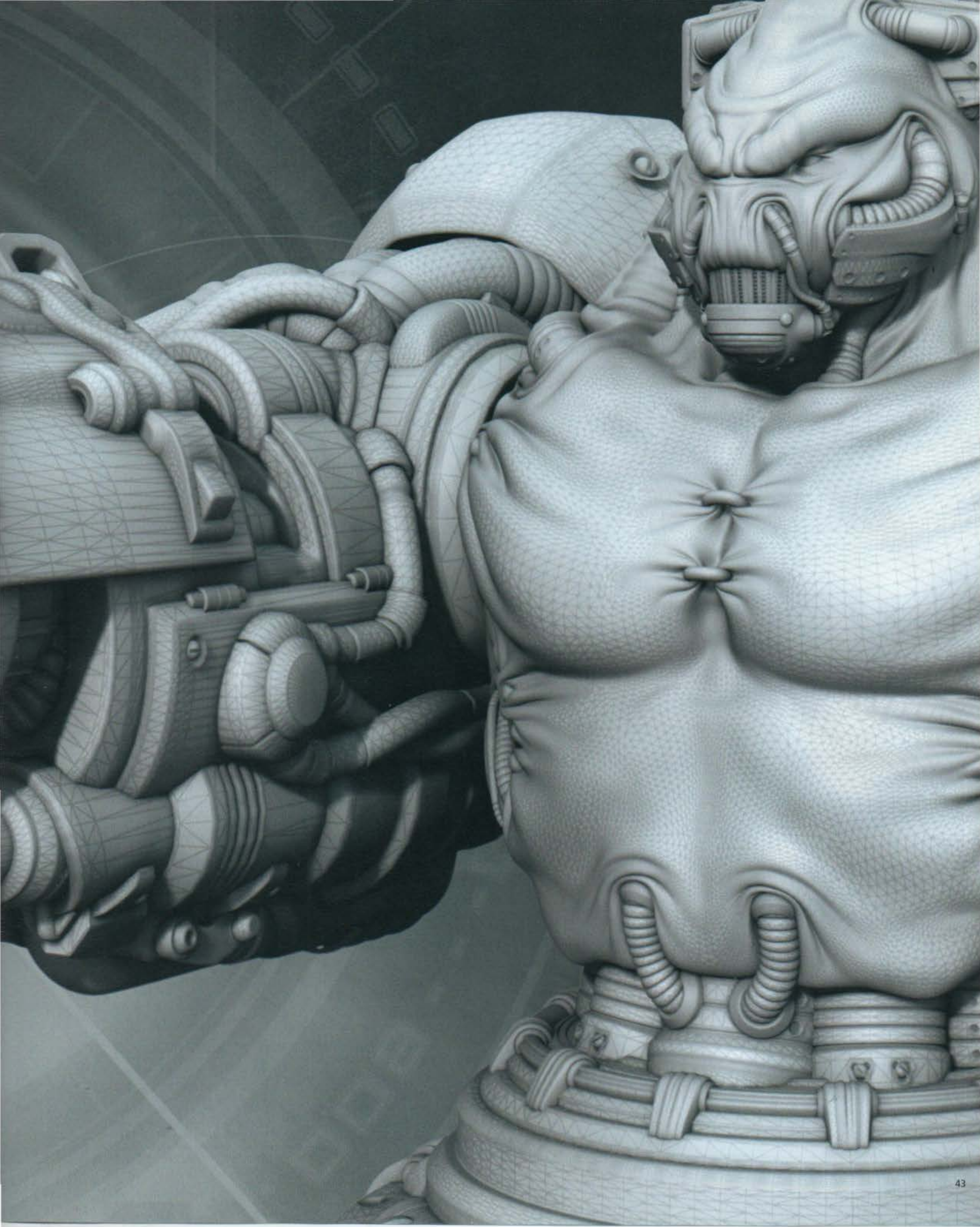


Id Software is a 25-person team – a one-game company fixed upon remaining a single productive unit, and a surprisingly small body to have left such immense craters in contemporary gaming's terrain. Having invented the frontiers of firstperson gaming during the early '90s, however, id has found itself fiercely competing for its own now saturated domain.

"The firstperson market has, of course, exploded," confirms id co-owner and lead designer **Tim Willits**. "Technology-wise, John Carmack is still the technology leader with the paradigm of the bump, specular, height and local map, and a lot of companies have to now do that with their own engines. But we can all make fun games and have them sell reasonably well, and so long as supply doesn't outweigh demand, I think that we can all benefit. It's exciting to see the different directions in which those companies have taken the genre – some folks in storytelling, some folks in physics and so on into whole new worlds."

In recent years, id has striven to uphold its market reputation by rebuilding some of its most successful titles on more thematically and artistically substantive soil than they're accustomed to.

TITLE: **QUAKE 4**
FORMAT: **360, PC**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **ID/RAVEN**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **Q4 2005 (PC), TBA (360)**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E151**



We've seen a fortress of single-layered corridors and 256-colour Nazi dogs become the globe-trotting military fiction of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, while the gore-spattered texture maps and (for their time) realistic planes of a hell-engulfed Mars were more recently reimagined as the technophobia and funfair heebie-jeebies of *Doom 3*.

But how, specifically, is *Quake* to weather this storm? Neither the series nor its creator inhabit that comfort zone any more where each product mounts a successive, groundbreaking rung on the technological ladder. *Quake* no longer benefits from the defining characteristics of its evolving engines, an issue exacerbated by the fact that the *Doom 3* code it now employs has yet to prove its own aesthetic diversity. With gamers more likely to remember the series' decaying and seemingly forgotten hues than its chronicles of mankind's crusade against the Strogg how, we ask chairman **Todd Hollenshead**, can its fourth iteration impose its identity?

"In this instance," he begins, "I think the fact that they're sharing technology is a good thing. I still believe that *Doom 3* is the best-looking technology on the PC that you can buy, even a year after it shipped. I think that if you start with a base like that, you really don't run away from it, and the two games are actually very different. The fact that we like making atmospheric games doesn't mean that they can't differ in style – *Quake* is very much an action romp, and it's very much a contrast to what *Doom 3* was."

As much as it may have over-exploited its resources, id retains the spiritual trademark on gaming's treatment of American sci-fi horror; if its craft is the skeleton of every FPS that gaming's ever seen, its art is the logical yet twisted fusion of Cronenberg's New Flesh and Reznor's Downward Spiral, disarmingly adolescent in its rage but savage in its disregard for the sanctity of the human body. It may seem somewhat hackneyed (a victim, in that regard, of its own success now that dozens have aped its looks), but only a fool would deny that *Quake*, coolly symbolised by its logo, still speaks with a commanding voice from the hubbub of overcrowded shelves.





Screenshots of *Quake 4* are more misleading than they are in most games' cases. The *Doom III* engine looks considerably better in motion than it does as a captured frame, its stencil-shadowed environment taking on a life of its own

"One thing that we want with the *Quake* franchise," states Willits, "is that when a customer goes to the store and sees a *Quake* title, they know that they'll get a high-quality product." Indeed, chastised as it sometimes is for its singular visual oeuvre, angular anatomies, predictable spawn-triggers and sometimes clunky encounters, *Doom 3* unquestionably provided one of the most intensely atmospheric environments that gaming had ever seen. From its outset (and, in truth, mostly *during* its outset), *Doom 3* depicted one of the least hospitable places imaginable, its intestinal passageways sweating oil and breathing menace, its airlocks oppressive to the point where a supposed retreat from the vacuum of Mars became a prison, spitting you out before, seconds later, sucking you reluctantly back in. But how does id itself respond to the persistent criticisms of its visual technology?

"I believe Doom 3 is the best-looking technology on the PC that you can buy"

"*Quake III* – that was one of the most licensed engines," Willits reassures, "and the *Doom 3* engine is actually capable of rendering more varied environments than that was. It's just that the art style of *Doom 3* and *Quake 4* are pretty similar – you can only build a space station in so many different ways. If you look at some of the *Prey* stuff, you can see that, in certain areas at least, they've taken it in a cool direction. But any time you have the bumpmapped, stencil-shadowed world, it's going to have a *Doom* signature to it, and the more you see technology advancing down specific paths, the more that signature's going to become apparent. But then you have *Enemy Territory*: Quake Wars – a game that shows there's still a lot of room to grow that technology up."



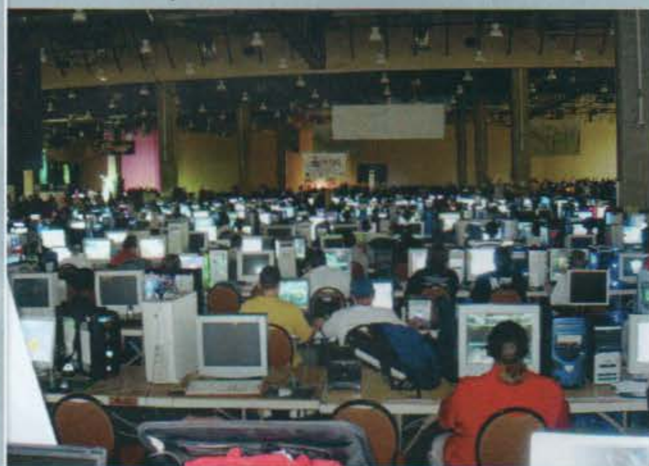
The Harvester is an early boss that recurs later in the game, unleashing missile spreads that must be shot from the sky before a more dedicated assault on its trunk and legs can begin. A frontal approach proves tantamount to suicide

Given a chance to settle down with *Quake 4*, we discover that beyond the leitmotif of biomechanical horror, much indeed feels different. This is clearly the rollercoaster to *Doom*'s ghost train, throwing its enemies forth rather than springing them from the shadows, weaving its ride unpredictably rather than methodically. Raven has implemented new AI routines into its allied NPCs, sharing them with a plentiful cast of Strogg opponents that have, to a degree at least, moved on from *Doom 3*'s primer of enemy manoeuvring.



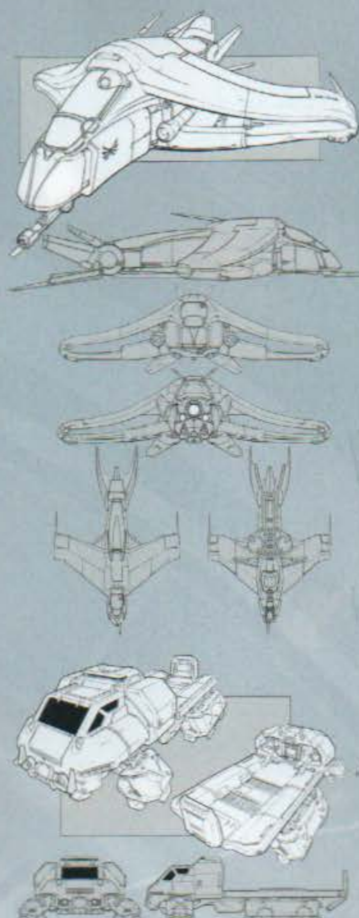
Teleporters are one of the many returning features that serve to recreate *Quake III*'s hurtling multiplayer dynamic, the speed at which weapons can be cycled and action overall takes place again providing a deathmatch that few can surpass

Rumble pact



Described as the 'Woodstock of gaming', the free yearly QuakeCon has grown used to seeing thousands of international shooter fans pass through its doors, gaming rig in arm and sleep patterns primed for imminent disarray. Though it plays host to all manner of competitive online games, the four-day event's most prominent titles are, naturally, those of its sponsor, id. This year, in particular, presented an irresistible opportunity for *Quake* to stake its claim on this gathered enthusiast crowd, as well as a chance for Nvidia to bolster its post-FX series revival with presentations and contests, while keynote speeches from the id senior staff and technical director John Carmack rounded off the bill.





Like *Halo*, the game establishes a healthy sense of camaraderie between the player and their fellow soldiers, demonstrating at the same time an adept balancing of the flows of a dramatised FPS. Your movements from one mode of combat to another, from one acquired weapon to the next, tally seamlessly with the game's logically unfolding narrative. But where Bungie's game offers a blend of exploration and confrontation, *Quake* retains more of *Doom 3*'s linear, set-piece dominated design. It hasn't set itself the best stage for emergent military behaviour, perhaps, but the character and enthusiasm in its developing singleplayer campaign (something to which screenshots frankly do little justice) is a pleasant enough surprise for now.

The clutch of levels we're shown represents a glimpse at the early springboard of *Quake 4*'s arcing story. More is shown in rolling form, most notably the capture, mutilation and transmutation of its hero, Matthew Kane, and as we remember back to when id waxed large on the volume of *Doom 3* kept secret until its release, we wonder how much of this tale remains unuttered. "We've actually shown more," reveals Willits. "We debated internally about whether to talk about the whole Stroggification process, but we thought that nowadays, with so much information being pumped to consumers and so many games that they can choose from, fans had to have the information about *Quake 4* so they could determine whether they wanted to buy it."





Movers and shakers: Id chairman Todd Hollenshead (top) and lead designer Tim Willits maintain a close eye on the games their company commissions, even if they're often produced by a licensee such as Raven

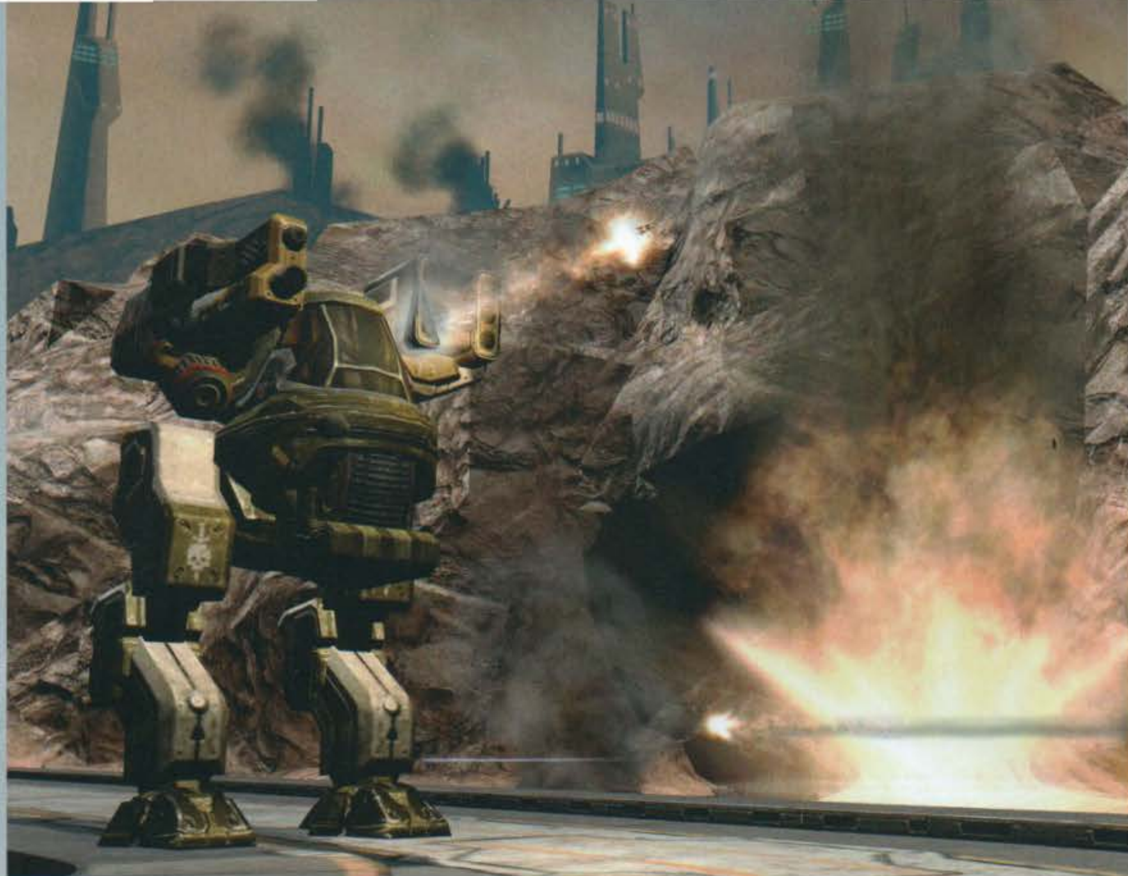
Indeed, that half-time twist that promises to transform the player's role in the invasion of Stroggos is quite a cat to spring from the bag, revealing much of how the game will play out in its closing acts. As an unveiling, however, it's also quite the subterfuge, because it soon emerges that the game's true highlight doesn't even fall within its solo campaign.

***Quake 4* multiplayer** is one of dogged videogame conservatism's most surprising achievements. It is, purely and simply, *Quake III* made afresh atop *Doom 3* technology, and as such represents the last thing id's recent output has led us to expect. Delightfully, it still features one of the most barbarous arsenals of any gaming contest, with weapons cast in the heaviest of metals, pummelling opponents with bursts of gnarled shrapnel. Railguns ejaculate pulses of light that gib their targets and chalk a familiar badge of accomplishment above their erupting form, while jump pads hurl players back and forth as they rain rockets down upon the strafe-battles playing out below.

PC games lumber onwards, beating down one technological barricade after another and tractor-pulling enthusiast gamers in awe of the display. But it's id, ironically, that's reminding us that amid the debris of progress lay many a great experience abandoned in its prime. *Quake 4* multiplayer isn't so much a revision as a resumption, demonstrating that while *Unreal Tournament* plundered every corner of the FPS landscape in pursuit of smart ideas, its dormant precursor harboured a more arresting view as to how best to evolve: don't.

"For one-on-one deathmatch," says Willits, "*Quake III* is still the best, and we wanted to bring that back with the new engine. We've added a Team Arena mod and other things, but if you try to deviate too far from the rules, you turn people off. It sounds good on paper, but when you add crazy game types you find that people only play what they're used to playing."

"As far as a team-based or class system is concerned," Hollinshead continues, "that's where we've gone with *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* and now with *Quake Wars*, but there's a big space for a pure, skills-based multiplayer experience. What we wanted to do with the *Doom 3* technology is take away a lot of the non-essentials and make it a question, simply, of who is the best player. That's why we looked at *Quake III*'s design philosophy – why it has continued to be popular with players seven years after its first public test."



Even though it's now a year old, the *Doom 3* engine continues to pepper its depicted battles with pyro, dust and smoke to rival the perceived cutting edge. Few home PCs can, in truth, be said to have conquered its technical requirements

In both Deathmatch and CTF, *Quake 4*'s balance is indeed remarkable, and therefore entirely familiar. Any weapon that's scooped from the ground by the bounding player hums immediately with potential. There are no pea-shooters here, just as there are no instances of splash damage being unjustly high or players otherwise dominating through armament alone. The game's ageless reward is the unending opportunity to shine, be it through a railgun crossed with a fortuitous twitch, a rocket launcher given a begging target or a humble pistol brandished in a frenzy of self-preservation. As it growls down remaining frags, hails the acquisition of quad-damage and acknowledges player supremacy, so *Quake* asserts its position as the creator of the modern deathmatch, and continues to run with its flag.

"Quake III employed faked physics, whereas Doom 3's engine is more realistic"

But how, we ask, is this possible? How has an engine noted for its creeping shadows and tower-crushing special effects picked up such momentous pace?

"We had to look at the network code and the engine," Willits reveals. "The big difference between *Quake III* and *Doom 3* is the amount of information sent over the network. Everything can be dynamic, from the physics to the lights and the characters, so there's much more that needs to be squeezed down that bandwidth. Raven reworked the network code and sped up the game logic so you could have more clients, but the biggest trick is this: *Quake III* employed faked physics, whereas the *Doom 3* engine is more realistic. So there are still subtle nuances that make the two games play differently, but the majority of people will definitely get that recognisable feeling.

"Raven," he goes on to explain, "has always worked very closely with us on all the projects they've done, because they've been the primary licensee of our technology. But on this game, we've worked closer than we ever have in the past, from the initial story to all the level designs and conceptual work on the characters. I go up there twice a month. Raven bring to the project a wealth of experience that the team here at id doesn't necessarily have. For instance, the first time they'd cut their teeth on squad-based AI was with the first *Elite Force* game; they then made advances with enemy AI with the first *Soldier Of Fortune*. They're a triple-A team that deserves a lot of praise for what they've done with this title."

This, then, brings us to the part of the battle that we so far haven't seen. *Quake 4* represents id's most committed effort to bring a comparable experience to both console and PC owners, and with Xbox 360 now in the equation, the commitment is unlikely to be

Second coming



With a series that seldom lets the premise of one episode have bearing on the next, *Quake* historians must look to the game's second instalment for background to the fourth. The Strogg – a race of hideous cyborgs bent on the assimilation (that unavoidable term) of all it encounters – began its invasion of Earth prior to the opening of *Quake II*, manipulating interstellar wormholes to drop themselves right on our planet's doorstep before piling in for the feast. A retaliatory strike team crashes and burns on the surface of Stroggos, leaving a single marine the task of destroying both its planetary defences and the Strogg's collective brain, the Makron. In *Quake 4*, a second wave of troops is sent in to finish what he began.





The mech has its own dedicated level that combines traditional on-rails ambushes with the freedom of FPS manoeuvring, granting the player heavier weapons than they'd usually carry into a firefight





Vehicles such as speeding hovertanks appear in later levels, though at this stage they don't quite provide the sense of escape from on-foot action enjoyed by *Half-Life 2* and *Halo* fans

undermined by the results. How has the team dealt with those 360 hardware quirks that have, quite publicly, had other developers a spin?

"The great thing about id and about having John Carmack on our team," reveals Willits, "is that John and his fellow cult of programmers have philosophies on how they write code. Microsoft looks at the great programmers out there and builds systems to support them, so for us, going from 360 alpha kits to beta was actually quite easy. The problem that we had is that they didn't give us the beta kits until so much longer down the line, and we still don't have final hardware – there's a CPU change coming in a month or two and new SDKs all the time. I know that Microsoft really wants to ship soon and we, obviously, want to ship when we can, but this hardware issue is a big problem. The transition, however, was painless."

Is there a chance that *Quake* may yet be chalked up alongside Microsoft's burgeoning list of launch titles? "I can think of reasons why it'd be good to be a launch title and reasons why it would be good not to be," Hollenshead remarks, "but also when you ask me about being a launch title, I have to ask exactly what that means. I'm not being a smartass, but what does that really mean? Does it mean the date that the system ships? Does it mean the same holiday season?" Willits elaborates: "Microsoft defines a launch title as anything that comes out within a certain window, and that happens to be quite large."

"The main thing that we want to get is the same gameplay experience on both formats," Hollenshead continues. "With *Doom 3* on PC and Xbox, we worked on both formats until they were really done – until we had the experience we wanted. That resulted in people waiting a little longer between the two versions – longer than I'd really have liked. But in the end, for us, the dates don't drive the experience – the experience dictates the dates."

Even for those that remain diametrically opposed to both its engine and its style, the advent of *Quake 4* will be an occasion to mark on the calendars of both its chosen formats. Will its brutish and unpretentious story, inspired in no small part by Starship Troopers, Aliens and whichever other movies are referenced later on, prove memorable enough to stand it fully outside of *Doom*'s striking shadows? How successfully will its console iteration translate the dizzying action of its multiplayer to twin analogue sticks, triggers and buttons? Can the fires of this online legend be stoked to the point where enraptured fans again have its insignia tattooed into their flesh and duly strewn across the internet? Can *Quake*, essentially, withstand the hostile atmosphere to make good its new invasion?





As the waves of Strogg intensify, so *Quake 4* mixes up the troop types contained therein. The acid test will be whether this wider range of opponents demands more varied tactics from the player



SUPER TROOPERS

Treasure, always determined to be revolutionary, has come full circle with a sequel to its first game, Gunstar Heroes. But is it a case of new dawn or old glory?

In 1992, a team of employees left Konami to form a new studio with a potentially lethal motto. Sick of sequels, they wanted to make a series of games that felt fresh and innovative, and to never be tied to past successes. In that respect, their stellar debut was a disaster. *Gunstar Heroes* was so loved for the vibrant chaos of its looks, the liberating unpredictability of its structure, the unrelenting ferocity of its action and the warping, scaling weirdness of its technical ambition that its fans started clamouring for a sequel almost immediately. That clamour, sustained as an increasingly forlorn thrum, has lasted for over a decade. Now it's to be answered with a new GBA game, but coming on the heels of magnificent sequels like *Gradius V* and moderately successful updates like *Advance Guardian Heroes*, has Treasure lost its

TITLE: **GUNSTAR SUPER HEROES**
FORMAT: **GBA**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **TREASURE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **TBC (JAPAN), TBA (UK)**

innovative way, or is its spirit as strong as ever? A visit to its Tokyo HQ finds founder and CEO **Masato Maegawa** ready with the answers:

Gunstar Heroes was famous for pushing the Mega Drive to its limits. Why did you decide to make this game on GBA and not PSP or even a home console?

Everybody always wants to know why we are not making it on the PSP! Well, the development of the game started more than two years ago. At that time, there was no DS or PSP. There was also a desire to revive *Gunstar* in 2D, and making a game like that in 2D is not an easy thing at all. For example, if we had made the game on the PS2, then we would have been forced to deliver a very high quality 2D. That means we would have had to deploy a lot of resources to do so – the work would actually have been much more difficult than making *Gunstar* in 3D. Two and a half years ago, wanting to make the game in 2D meant the GBA was the best platform for us. To be honest, the choice was so obvious that we did not wonder about it for long. Even now, *Gunstar* fits better on a GBA than a DS.



Gunstar Heroes was always famed for the scale, imagination and oddness of its bosses, and it seems certain that Treasure will be trying to match – or even best – that tradition in the GBA update



The GBA's smaller screen means the action of the Mega Drive version has had to be condensed, relying on emphasising the fury of close-quarters, hand-to-hand combat along with the ballistic acrobatics of the original

Did the game really require more than two years of development?

A programmer named Nami [Hideyuki Suganami, one of *Gunstar Heroes*' two original programmers] is at the centre of the team. At the very beginning he and another person were the only members of the development team, trying to find the right approach for the game on the GBA. That lasted for a year. And then as the direction was made clear, people were added and the development itself lasted for a year and half.

***Gunstar Super Heroes* is an update to one of your best-loved games. How close will it be to the original?**

As you know this game is the sequel to the original Mega Drive version, so it shares the very same philosophy of intense shooting. But we agreed from the very beginning to not make the same game as the one on the MD. This is not a remake but a true sequel. I told Nami not to look at the MD version so he would not be influenced and instead make something new. *Gunstar Super Heroes* may look and feel the same as the original, but systems have been entirely remade from the ground up to deliver a new game experience. The first main difference from the MD is that the new game deepens the game experience. On the MD, it was a pure shooting game so you did not need to get too close to the enemies. You would shoot them from a distance and that was that. This time, we've added close combat techniques. You can punch or kick your enemies, deflect their lasers using a sword, that kind of thing. We are making the game so players will feel the fun in punching or kicking their adversaries in various ways. Another difference concerns the score system. This didn't have much purpose on the MD version, but on GBA, it's much more important. We made it very appealing for veteran users. The score and the life gauge are intimately linked. For example, when a middle boss appears, it's worth a certain amount of points. The score is then calculated by multiplying this amount by the length of your life gauge. So in Score Attack mode, you would need to avoid being hit in order to keep the life gauge as full as possible and to get a higher score. Usually, games offer a harder mode when users clear it. I don't think that's appropriate and I prefer to offer players various ways to enjoy a game, not just make it harder so it lasts longer. That's why the Time and Score Attack modes will enable players to return to the game many times after they clear the main mode.



Treasure's character design remains as distinctive as ever, mostly down to the influence of its main artist throughout nearly all of the projects over the studio's 13-year life

How do you intend to make punches and kicks important features of the gameplay?

I want the game experience to be fun and cool. And in that aspect, these new actions do really deliver – at least I think so! But the main





Masato Maegawa was Treasure's founder, and as its CEO remains doggedly committed to safeguarding his studio's creative independence







Ikatwoga



***Ikaruga*, itself what Maegawa terms a 'true sequel' to *Radiant Silvergun*, is another Treasure game whose brilliance has produced a yearning for a sequel. Can he provide any hope of one? "I can't get into details. What I can tell you that we had a project in mind. But it is always our fear that if we keep making the same thing – or even make it twice – then creators and players alike may be bored. So we had this idea of a different version of the current *Ikaruga*, but we wondered if players would enjoy it and in addition if we would feel excited in making it. This is always our main concern. So the ideas are here but the main question is when to do it or if we need to do it at all."**

aspect of these actions is that they are very powerful, much more powerful than the guns. So if you want to challenge the Time Attack mode for instance, you'll need to master these actions. When you shoot at the enemies from a distance, it takes time to destroy them, especially the bosses or middle bosses. In many ways, I think this reminds me of the philosophy of *Alien Soldier*.

Gunstar Heroes is more than a decade old now. What do you think this style of game still has to offer?

To be honest, I don't feel it's outdated in any way. Treasure's image is often associated with *Gunstar Heroes*. It is certainly our most famous IP, even nowadays. There were numerous requests from users for a sequel. It has not be updated or followed with a sequel in 12 years but I really think it has kept its strength intact since then. The game sold about 80,000 copies in Japan and I think around 200, 000 overseas. That was quite a good score at the time.

The game was published by Sega, and Sega still owns the IP, so did you have to get clearance to start work on the game?

Of course we're always talking with Sega about various projects and we told them we could make this new version at Treasure. But actually we started to work on this game before we even spoke to Sega. It wasn't until October of last year that we brought it to Sega. It was clear to us that Sega has the best market power to sell it and they agreed to publish it sometime between October and November last year. Of course there was the risk that Sega would tell us we had to publish it on our own – meaning under Treasure's own brand – but even so, we were sure Sega would help us. So we were not that concerned when we started to develop it.

Having already made the GBA version of *Guardian Heroes* first, did you find this experience brought you any useful lessons in developing *Gunstar Super Heroes*?

These are two separate paths. *Guardian* was developed under Kikuchi's [Tetsuhiko Kikuchi, also known as HAN, Treasure's key artist] direction. *Gunstar* is under Nami's. These two projects ran in parallel without much interaction between the two. So in technical terms, there was no lesson learnt from one project to the other. Actually, *Gunstar*'s development may have begun before *Guardian*. With these two developments, I think we've done everything we wanted with the GBA. In addition to the game's requirements, we tried to add tons of special

"The game sold about 80,000 copies in Japan and around 200,000 overseas. That was a good score at the time"





effects using the hardware specifications to their limits. And when I say we are using the hardware to its limit, it is really true, in the sense that at rare moments the program is running at the absolute limit of its capacity without almost any inconveniences to the player.

How were players' and fans' reactions to the release of *Guardian Heroes* on the GBA?
From a sales aspect, it has been a little disappointing, to be honest. As for the game itself, there has been a mixed reaction. When we made *Guardian Heroes* on the Sega Saturn, we had two ideas in mind: coolness and dynamism. But because of the GBA's limitations, especially its small screen, the impact of the original ideas was diminished. For the fans, I think they found it difficult to understand why two games sharing the same title could not be more the same. In fact, the GBA version was a very different concept. Some of the users understood it and gave us some very positive feedback.

Technically, the GBA is seen as being in some ways more powerful than the Mega Drive. What differences have you found between both pieces of hardware? What have you been able to do on one you could not on the other?
I don't think that the MD is less powerful in some respects. The only big difference is obviously the size of the screen. It is *really* small on the GBA. With a smaller screen, you need to make bigger characters. On the MD, you have a much bigger screen so you can shoot the enemies from a distance in a relative safe location. On the GBA, this distance is much shorter so there are almost no safe spots. This is one key difference between this version and the original. Now, I don't even want to think about the coming GB Micro! But it is true that the GBA offers technically more possibilities, obviously. We are able to deliver various operations at the same time like for example several layers of scrolling and rotation in realtime. We can even give an '*After Burner*' 3D effect to the game.



A graphical technique which pays homage to Sega's *After Burner* is just one of many elements which give nods to other works. Half the fun is in recognising the sources…

Do you think that this new *Gunstar* is targetting fans of the original version?
We have a totally opposite way of thinking. Of course the fans will certainly be interested in this game but the fans alone would be difficult for us as a market. We understood that with *Guardian* – we need newcomers.

Do you think the controls of a game like *Gunstar Heroes* are likely to be offputting to newcomers?
No. *Gunstar* is originally a game which can be enjoyed with only two main commands: shoot and jump. We needed to keep that simplicity. But in order to accommodate veterans and new players alike, we designed various level of play. The Simple mode is really about shoot and jump and this mode can be played by anyone – really anyone. The Easy mode is targeting kids who are used to videogames. With these two modes, everybody will be able to get to the ending. But the Normal mode is really what I would like gamers to play, as we put all our thinking into it. But since you need to master the use of three buttons (A, B and R), many told me this was a little complex. That is why we made the Simple mode. In *Gunstar*, you have three main shot styles: the one which fixes the firing direction and lets you run forward or backward, the one where you are standing still but able to fire in all directions, and the free fire mode. These three styles are really well exploited in the Normal mode and that is one reason I would like gamers to try this particular mode. As for veteran players, they will find the Hard mode quite challenging. On Mega Drive, the actions were divided into two categories, red and blue. On GBA you will be able to switch freely, so you would not be limited like before. For example, you will be able to switch to Vulcan fire mode when you need it and not have to wait until you get the proper option.



As is tradition, the game hinges on a continual supply of baddies, providing a blank canvas for your repertoire of punches, kicks, slides and devastating combo weapon attacks

Will the game support two players as it did on the Mega Drive?
No, it won't. At the very beginning of the project we were thinking about a fourplayer mode. But it was impossible to do on the GBA. We'd already had tremendous problems implementing such an option in *Guardian Heroes*. What about twoplayer then? Well, if we'd done that we would have had to design the game to enable two players to share the same game experience. In many places in the game that would have forced us to take out some effects, to scale down some aspects of the game. That would have made our game really not as cool as it is right now. So we decided to go singleplayer – that decision was made at a very early stage.

"We tried to add tons of special effects, and when I say we are using the hardware to its limits, it's true"



The loyalty of Treasure's fanbase isn't caused by an unimpeachable brilliance: not all of the company's games match its best, and few would want to shelve the likes of *Light Crusader* and *Tiny Toons: Buster's Bad Dream* alongside the brilliance of *Bangai-O* and *Ikaruga*. Rather, the company inspires devotion because so many believe that its very existence is a *good thing*, proving that the principle of boutique development is viable, and that prizing creativity over commercialism can bring sustainable financial success. But at a time when the arcade business is faltering, and the console scene is ramping up both its budgets and its conservatism in the face of next-generation technology, how will Treasure face a somewhat unwelcoming future?

How many people are actually working at Treasure today?

If you consider only fulltime employees, we are about 20. But we don't work like other companies. I mean we don't make games with just fulltime employees. We like to give them a lot of freedom. For example, Nami is a freelancer. I like to build each team according to the project's needs. If I had to make my games with my employees only, I fear they would get tired, finishing one development and immediately having to help on another. I don't think that helps being creative. In a small company like mine, it is difficult if not impossible to give one or two months of holiday at the end of a project, even if they are very badly needed.

It has been some time since Treasure released a new arcade game. Are you still working for the arcade market and if so, when can we expect the next title?

The arcade team is still hard at work! It developed *Radiant Silvergun*, then *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*. Yes – *Gradius V* was originally an arcade game. Konami decided otherwise. But this 'long silence' from our arcade team is because of this change. Had *Gradius V* been released in the arcade, you would not have felt that Treasure was absent from the arcade for so long. So, yes, the arcade team is working on a new shooter for the Taito Type-X. They actually work in the room beside this one, but they have not arrived yet as they prefer working at night.

How do you think small and medium-sized game developers will survive during the next generation?

I don't think this is such a big problem. Of course it is not going to be easy but even small companies like ours are able to deliver good-quality visuals without spending a fortune like ¥200 or ¥300 million (£1-1.5 million). It's a lot to do with how you work. But at the same time, it is also true that with so much power you don't know how far you can or have to go. There is almost no limit. It is about you fixing your own limitation to avoid any problems in your development process.

Nintendo has announced a download service for the coming Revolution console. What do you think about this? Will Treasure be part of it?

Nintendo will come to us to ask if we want our games to be made available through this service. There is no problem with that. I always think of the internet as a separate market to the standard package market. I don't think the package business will disappear because of the development of the online market – I don't see the markets as rivals. We need to keep making very fun and appealing games, packaged and online alike. That doesn't change. Whether online or in the shops, if we make our games right, people will play and enjoy them.





Remember when sprite scaling and rotation were the freshest and most exciting visual effects in gaming? Treasure does, and *Gunstar Super Heroes* ladles them on





Boxing clever

Treasure has always had the reputation of a team that would push hardware to the limits. How does Maegawa feel about the new consoles on the horizon? "The three consoles have been revealed and many things have been announced, but to be honest… I'm perplexed. I'm pretty much sure that most of the game makers would like one standard platform. Manufactures want to differentiate their machines with concepts but, to be honest, inside the box it is almost the same. These are PCs which are only different because of their respective CPU and GPU. The main difference will be in the software line-up and how the big titles will be marketed. We've arrived at a time when developers are going multiplatform and I don't think this is a good trend. My main concern now in choosing a platform is finding one that enables me to work smoothly in developing my game. CPU power today is so high that we no longer need to be concerned about limitations – all the consoles are powerful enough."

BUILDING THE PERFECT GAME

How would you make the most ambitious title of all time? One way would be to borrow it all from some of gaming's best-known legends...

			1 H Humour							
3 Li Lighting	4 Be Bemani									
11 Na Nailgun	12 Mu Music									
19 K Kudos	20 Ca Character	21 Sg Strategy	22 Ti Tutorial	23 V Vehicle	24 Cr Controls	25 Mn Mission	26 Fe Freedom	27 Co Combo	28 Mi Minigame	29 C Cut-
37 Rb Robot	38 Sr Story	39 X Explosion	40 Fu Fun	41 Fa Frustration	42 Mo Morality	43 Tc Tactics	44 Ru Reputation	45 Ro Romance	45 Ju Jumping	47 A Ag
55 Ch Checkpoint	56 Sa Sandbox	71 Zo Zombie	72 Hs High-score	73 Ta Tradition	74 W Weaponry	75 Re Reset	76 Os Oversteer	77 Ir Invert	78 Pt Platforms	79 A Au
87 Ff RPG	88 Ra Radar	89 Di Driving								
				57 La Laser	58 Cp Coop	59 Pr Power-up	60 Nd Nudity	61 Pz Puzzle	62 Su Structure	63 D Du
				90 Ac Acrobatics	91 Th Thug	92 Pa Pause	93 U Unlockable	94 Rp Replay	95 Pu Punch	96 A Anim

						2 **He** Hero
	5 **B** Boss	6 **C** Crate	7 **N** Ninja	8 **O** Objective	9 **F** Fighting	10 **Ne** Nebula
	13 **Al** Alien	14 **Si** Sprite	15 **P** Physics	16 **S** Ranking	17 **Cl** Collectable	18 **Ar** Art
m tbomb	31 **Ga** Graphics	32 **Ge** Grenades	33 **Dd** Breasts	34 **Se** Speech	35 **Br** Branding	36 **Ku** Kung-fu
d ding	49 **In** Intro	50 **Sp** Sports	51 **Sq** Squads	52 **Te** Texture	53 **I** Interface	54 **Xe** Shmup
o pping	81 **Er** Bugs	82 **Pb** Mario	83 **Bi** Baddie	84 **Po** Polygons	85 **Ai** AI	86 **Rn** Running

d ods	65 **Tb** Turbo	66 **Dy** Dying	67 **Hp** Healthpack	68 **Eg** Emergence	69 **Tm** Timer	70 **Mg** Magic
m nbat	98 **Bk** Background	99 **Cs** Costume	100 **Ex** Exploration	101 **Fa** Fantasy	102 **Md** Murder	103 **No** Refuge

Games are constantly evolving. Unlike opera, Japanese kabuki theatre, and EastEnders, the games we play significantly change in as little as five years – barely a console generation.

Gamers and journalists typically express the opposite view. Particularly among older gamers, the widespread perception is that there are no new ideas in games. Because the pace of change is actually quite fast, small innovations get lost in the noise. For example, the sniper rifle zoom function was first introduced in Shiny's *MDK*. It's now a staple in the shooter genre, and has enlivened everything from *GoldenEye* to *Max Payne 2*, but did you ever see a front cover saluting this innovation? These incremental innovations add up.

The videogame industry's fondness for sequels doesn't help matters. Faced with shelves heaving under the weight of the latest *Final Fantasys*, *Gran Turismos* and *Grand Theft Autos*, gamers are beset by an recurrent sense of déjà vu.

But the chief reason for invention going unnoticed may be the way committed gamers tend to think: the way they process information. By and large, the committed are a logical, cold-headed bunch. They reduce realtime strategy games, for instance, to their mechanics – strip the orcs and the warships from the screen to see the gameplay tactics of the AI laid bare, its weaknesses to be exploited. On one level, to some, *Halo 2* and *Call Of Duty 2* are very nearly the same game: the setting filtered out, the important differences only showing in the varying tempo and rhythm of play – whereas nobody would claim that Saving Private Ryan and The Lord Of The Rings are the same.

This reductionist impulse is easily seen in previews of upcoming games. *Tony Hawk's Underground* is *GTA* meets the previous *Tony Hawk* games. *Kameo* is *Zelda* meets *Dynasty Warriors*. Like Dr Frankenstein, game designers graft X on to Y and then plug in the game controller with a cry of "It's alive!"

Instead of labelling this as innovation-by-numbers, we've decided to exploit it. On the cusp of a new generation of machines – with all the promise and enhanced capabilities they will offer – we've attempted to take the best or most interesting aspects from countless games and

assemble them to make The Perfect Game – or at least The Perfect Game In Accordance With What We Know Everyone Likes About All Those That Have Gone Before. If evolution follows its typical cross-fertilisation path, this could offer a glimpse, perhaps, of what we might be playing in 2010.

We're not going to be burdened by the technical realities. If some core functionality of a highlighted game has demonstrated that it's struck a note with gamers, through sales or critical acclaim, we assume it can be lifted and fused into the title. Some day others will do it, after all.

But, equally, this isn't entirely about blue-sky thinking. Sony's Ken Kutaragi may be readying with PlayStation 3 the Matrix-style jack-in experience he infamously promised for PlayStation 2: we're not holding our breath. So no cerebral interfaces, no VR, and no extreme fantasies here. The game proposed has to be feasible – if extraordinarily ambitious – on next-gen consoles.

In this article, we plunder the crown jewels of some of the best games yet created to, piece by piece, propose our groundbreaking fusion. But first some decisions on platform, genre, and the core skeleton of the game.

The target machine isn't a difficult decision – with release imminent, it would be churlish not to launch The Perfect Game on Xbox 360: Microsoft's new console will have sufficient power and networking support to host any near-term cutting-edge game you'd care to throw at it. If PlayStation 3 actually is significantly more powerful, The Perfect Game will be reprogrammed to get the best out of it.

What about genre? Sports, racing, thirdperson action/adventures, firstperson shooters and sim games have all been among the bestselling titles of recent years. Conversely, platform games, puzzle games and dedicated realtime strategy games can be ruled out, as can anything too tricksy – albeit innovative – such as a camera- or microphone-driven game.

GTA: San Andreas is by no means perfect. Our genetic experiment can improve upon it: hot coffee or not.

These early decisions rule out contributions from some great games – notably, some of the finest titles ever realised will miss the experiment. *GoldenEye*, *Super Mario 64*, *Gran Turismo* and *Halo* clearly won't fit into our thirdperson action/adventure sandbox-frame.

Interface

53
I
Interface

Another World

Like the more familiar *Ico*, the mid-'90s French action/adventure *Another World* didn't burden the screen with data. Neither will The Perfect Game. To find out your bank balance, go to a cash machine. Health and morale will be visible from your appearance.



Character interaction

44
Ru
Reputation

Fable

***Fable* is only a little more successful than *GTA: San Andreas* at realising a world that recognises your place in it. But the ambitious concept of an actively renowned hero is nevertheless the heart of Lionhead's game, so into the mix it goes.**



Our ambitious game will either be a brilliant triumph or (not the plan) a mishmash that flies too close to the sun

Perhaps predictably, the inspiration for the core gameplay mechanic – the central spirit of The Perfect Game – will be *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The popularity of such 'sandbox city' titles shows no sign of abating, and the genre offers fantastic opportunities for ambitious game designs of The Perfect Game's ilk. Yet while it certainly crams an awful lot in – with the standard story and gameplay infamously augmented by everything from burglary to property investment, and the freedom of countless spontaneous encounters – clearly won't fit into our thirdperson action/adventure sandbox-frame.

We've also decided not to acquire a licence. Licences are at their most useful as a marketing tool; our ambitious game will either be a brilliant triumph or (and this obviously isn't the plan) a mishmash that flies too close to the sun. If it's the former, the gamebuying public will recognise its brilliance, as they did *The Sims*, *Half-Life*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, and many more. If it's a failure, no licence will save it or recoup the hefty



Environment and navigation

26
Fe
Freedom

Grand Theft Auto (series)

The basics of The Perfect Game will be familiar to *GTA* fans: bright lights, a big city, and go-where-you-like-when-you-like gameplay. Vehicles and buildings can be entered at will, and missions are scattered across a gradually unlocked metropolis.

Graphical techniques

31
Ga
Graphics

Half-Life 2

It's not unusual to hear fellow gamers greet some wilder fringe of the real world – a gritty backstreet, say, or photogenic industrial decay – with: "That's just like *Half-Life 2*!" It approaches photorealism, and so will The Perfect Game.







Story exposition

38 **Sr** Story

Half-Life 2

While The Perfect Game will take control of the camera occasionally, narrative information, mission outlines and so on will be relayed by characters, in game, as in *Half-Life 2*. Listen when you want to, mess about when you don't.



Hand-to-hand combat

97 **Cm** Combat

Ninja Gaiden

The *GTA* games' thumping and stomping is far too brutish. *Devil May Cry*, *God Of War* and even Bungie's controversial *Oni* are all tempting, but blackbelt *Ninja Gaiden* is our choice, though we'll add barer knuckle, below-the-belt moves.

Animation

95 **Am** Animation

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

***Chaos Theory*'s balletic character animation will breathe life into The Perfect Game's hero and its other inhabitants. Big strides are possible here, compared to the *GTA* series, and even the likes of *Max Payne*.**



development budget. Besides, there's enough to be squeezed into The Perfect Game without the extra burden of working around someone else's IP (or dealing with their lawyers). No, the millions saved will go on extra development staff.

Perhaps the most difficult decision concerns whether or not our game should be a multiplayer experience. It would be easy to say: 'It's *San Andreas* meets *EverQuest*' and leave it at that. However, The Perfect Game is aiming to advance the thirdperson action/adventure genre – a genre that from *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid* to *Prince Of Persia 2* has been exemplified by intense, singleplayer experiences.

While we hope to employ Xbox Live in some fashion, we're not going the claim The Perfect Game can be turned into a multiplayer prospect at the flick of a switch (despite the urge to do so, given that every commentator out there – good and bad – has significant online activity built into their vision of gaming's future). Rather, it will be a state-of-the-art solo outing.

Imagine some mad scientist who has amassed shelves of chilled, scrupulously clean test tubes containing the pure DNA of all the best games. Moreover, when reaching for the essence of a famous game, he can further select a tube containing exactly the specific aspect of the game he wants to isolate, and then merge that strand into the hybrid Perfect Game.

Note that this shouldn't be taken as some definitive Best Games Ever list, published by the backdoor. While every game selected excels in the trait we have chosen it for, there are clearly many, many more great games whose DNA has been left on the shelf. All genetic tampering is somewhat subjective, as campaigners constantly warn us.

Dev notes:

The brain game

Obviously, The Perfect Game will boast the type of realistically modelled physics that are fast becoming a standard. Generating scenarios dynamically is more practical when the gameplay can be set up using Newton's Laws, as well as a designer's ingenuity.

Middleware would cover the basics here, with much customisation, of course. Havok's new Hydracore solution is specially written for multithreaded machines such as Xbox 360, and Unreal Engine 3 comes complete with a physics API.

AI would be more difficult. As game graphics approach realism and developers build environments teeming with characters, the general stupidity of game entities is ever more apparent to players. The Perfect Game has even greater AI challenges than this generic problem, however. It requires different kinds of AI application to a typical sandbox or action game – procedural methods for generating complex action encounters indoors and outdoors, on demand, AI for the squad-based gameplay, and strategic level AI to run the city and the opposing factions, and to determine the resultant the ebb and flow of control. It also requires nifty, bespoke routines for the dynamic music, and for determining how the visuals and moral framework of the city and its inhabitants are changing according to your play. (This last point would be relatively easy to cheat, however, since players will read intelligence into fairly simple visible changes, driven by simple rules).



Duality
Special feature 1

63 **Du** Duality

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

A Link To The Past's Light and Dark duality will inspire a similar day-and-night approach to The Perfect Game. Some areas will only be accessible at night, and will need to followed up in the day, and vice versa.



Shooting and weapons

74 **W** Weaponry

Max Payne 2

Difficult. No thirdperson shooter beats the best FPSes for precision and control. *MGS3* and later *Splinter Cells* are among the strongest candidates, but *Max Payne 2* is selected for its straightforward, fluid shooting.

Dev notes:

The price of ambition

Assuming it was feasible, how much would it cost to create The Perfect Game? We asked a few developers, who baulked at pricing out the project in public – either because they believed it was potentially too big and different to realistically put a budget on without months of preparatory investigation, or because they didn't want to reveal to publishers how they'd budget such a game. One also admitted it was worried that the publishers "would all want one!"

Our back-of-a-napkin maths – assuming a flexible, brilliant (and expensive) team that expands and contracts over the project's lifecycle between 30 and 100 members at its peak, some bought-in technology, some outsourcing, and about three years in development – comes up with a total development cost of £10-12 million.

Rough rule-of-thumb publishing estimates might see that backed up with a £10m marketing campaign and maybe the same again on manufacture, licensing fees, and distribution into retail.

Maybe £30m, then, to get The Perfect Game into players' hands. A snip, surely.



Squad-based action

51 **Sq** Squads

Freedom Fighters

There will be teamwork if you want it in The Perfect Game. *Freedom Fighters*' control system is robust, yet more than sufficiently nuanced for this purpose. AI-driven workarounds exist for dedicated soloists.

So, all of The Perfect Game's many elements are spelled out across these pages, but what about themes and specifics? In what sort of environment will these play out? For atmosphere think, perhaps, Data East's SNES classic, *Shadowrun*. Let's continue to fill in some more of the finer details...

The Perfect Game opens in a dark alley. Apparently having passed out, you wake with no memories and only a few trinkets to identify you.

Stepping beyond the alley, you find a teeming, routinely hostile, near-future city brought to life in almost photorealistic 3D. You quickly realise you will need to fight to survive in this place, while



Strategy

21 **Sg** Strategy

Rome: Total War

One of *Rome*'s triumphs is combining local battles under a strategic banner. The Perfect Game will, too, but think areas of control, resources and choosing a front to fight on.



Moral dimension

Special feature 2

42 **Mo** Morality

Black & White

Tying in with the light and dark aspect, over time, how you're achieving your progress in The Perfect Game will affect the city's people, their behaviour, and even the fabric of the buildings.

Exploration

99 **Ex** Exploration



Outcast

This once hyped and then overlooked title delivered a fully realised alternate world. Whereas many level designers are too fond of cutting and pasting, *Outcast*'s varied locales and natives made exploration a pleasurable end in itself.

Soundtrack

12 **Mu** Music

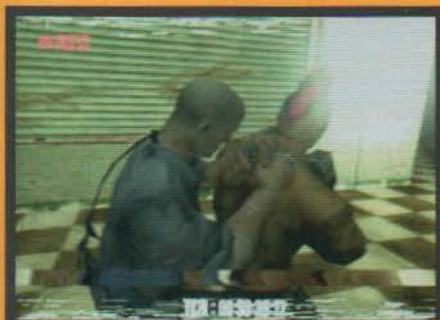


Final Fantasy series

Breaking new ground in game soundtracks, we'll chop up the sweeping compositions of *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu (whose music has often been played to packed concert halls) and splice it together as interactive, generative music.

seeking to discover who you are. As you progress, you'll find that some citizens appear to hold clues to your story, others are probably lying – and many are simply after the possessions and resources you have scrapped together.

Much of the gameplay is dynamically created. As you explore, encounters and opportunities will present themselves – some scripted, a great many generated by the game on demand from the raw material of the city. While the hero has no memory, you soon discover a core set of skills buried beneath – and you certainly know how to fight. As you gain experience, more of your skills return.



Art direction

18 **Ar** Art

Manhunt

While suffocating thugs with plastic bags made the headlines, *Manhunt* did suffocating urban atmosphere, too. The Perfect Game will be '70s De Niro – a city gone rotten.

Take a pugilistic approach, and you'll remember long-forgotten training in all manner of weapons. Equally, sneak about or drive, and you'll bring out those hidden, lost talents.

From the start, you'll have to make moral choices. Do you rob the old lady, or do you save her from muggers? Are you going to bring the city under your control as a criminal mastermind, or as a vigilante fighting back – or both, Don Corleone style? The decisions you make will determine who comes to join you, and whether they stick around.

Importantly, your moral standing will also affect whether you operate better by day or by night. There are different people – possibly even creatures – out at different times of the day. You won't be able to entirely avoid either the sunlight or the denizens of the street at night, but you'll find that either the hustle of the day or the cover of night will better play to your developing strengths...

Given time, you'll get together a small gang, and command and control your cohorts as you go into action with simple, squad-based commands. Later you'll have hundreds, with strongholds, outposts, and captains posted about the city. Tactical battles – for example, turf wars for control of the drug trade, or to drive the dealers out – will be going on all around you, whether you're there or not. Your territories' borders are in constant flux. If direct action is more your thing, you'll be able to enlist men and woman who can run the strategic and logistical side of your operation for you – although true mastery of the city will only be achieved by players who do both.

Certainly, taking a direct-action approach will be tempting. Just going down a street on the way to a scripted mission, you might find yourself embroiled in a gun battle, which turns into a local skirmish for control of a block. You call reinforcements, enter



Missions

25 **Mn** Missions

Hitman: Contracts

While much of the action will be procedural, the game will boast excellent set-pieces. *Hitman*'s were showstoppers (our progressive AI will ensure that they don't fall over).

buildings and overcome wildlife that has taken refuge there, snipe enemy bombardiers from the roof, and seize the buiding's automated security systems by breaking into a central computer. You might even retreat, and leave the block to the enemy. Such encounters won't be 'designed' any more than a particular encounter between two warring parties in *Age Of Empires* is – they will be generated as required – and several will be underway somewhere in the city at any one time. You will be free to join and leave as you think most effective, but remember: your people are watching.

In addition, there will be countless story-based

Collecting NPCs
Special feature 3

17 **Cl** Collectable

Pokémon

A variety of one-off characters with unique strengths and weaknesses will be unlocked and added to your forces. You can fight alongside them in squad-based action, set them to work as lieutenants on the strategic map, and deploy them individually too. But the other side can also win them over…

Speech and spot effects

34 **Se** Speech



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

The radio gets the plaudits, but the entire *GTA: San Andreas* audio package is difficult to fault. The voice recordings and scripts are of an entirely different class to other games. Witty dialogue, emphatically delivered, should no longer be optional.

Targeting/ navigation

24 **Cr** Controls



The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

***Ocarina Of Time* offered wonderfully smooth and intuitive control. While numerous games have copied its basics (including the must-have target lock), The Perfect Game will go back to the original N64 title for the DNA.**

Driving/ flying

23 **V** Vehicle



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

It's tempting to try and shoehorn *Burnout 3* or similar in here, but the change in velocity might be a lurch. No prizes for originality, then, but *GTA: San Andreas* will be the exhilarating model for getting about The Perfect Game.

mission arcs woven into the fabric of the game. Key NPCs will emerge with deals, grudges, and clues about your identity. By progressing through these episodes even as you win control of the city, a complex plot will unfold where you'll uncover who it was that dumped you in the alley – and who you were before they got to you.

As you move towards this conclusion, the city will be changing around you, depending on your style, your actions, and the key NPCs you have gathered and promoted. Promote a bunch of talented thugs and you'll see the result; it might be a cheap way of taking over the city, but the buildings will fall into disrepair and the streets will see an explosion in petty crime. Gather a collection of top-flight perfectionists, however, and the areas of the city under your control will be visibly bettered. The people will love you, even if they fear you. (Morals and methods will be two different variables). But have you the time to take such a slow and costly approach with anarchy all around?

When the story is over, you'll find the game has only just begun. There are numerous cities across the continent that need your assistance – or that could fall under the reach of your criminal empire. How far can you and your crew expand and connect your operations without losing your heartland? You could spend a lifetime finding out…

With the graphical fidelity and fine-grained gameplay detail of a *Splinter Cell* wedded at the top-level strategy game, in a *GTA*-style sandbox, The Perfect Game would be the most ambitious project ever embarked upon.

That said, the brief is not supposed to be too fantastic. There's no multiplayer mode suggested, for instance: the game is meant to be played for months, not minutes, and besides, the extra complications of adding multiplayer support could imperil the main design aims.

Microsoft might insist on some online functionality. One appealing compromise might be to add new story/mission arcs as episodic add-ons, which would slot in and be automatically calibrated according to your current resources – and regardless of whether you'd finished the core story, and were now playing the purely freeform game.

Worryingly, while The Perfect Game has more of an action/adventure focus, it still reminds us of Elixir Studios' much-hyped, fatally delayed, and subsequently little played *Republic: The Revolution*. That game had some fantastic ideas that were ultimately too stretched or watered-down because, at the design stage, the developer wanted everything – from super-detailed 3D graphics to the micro-simulation of citizens' lives, with political machinations of every sort to be supported, and innumerable options for getting results.

We want that, too: and we want to play The Perfect Game. But don't put off buying *Killzone 2* or *PGR3* while you're waiting. This little project will be some time coming. 



Tactics

43 **Tc** Tactics

Resident Evil 4

We want players to be able to attack situations with whatever weapons they favour – but always feel in control. So we'll follow Capcom's amazing balancing act.



Physical challenges

89 **Ac** Acrobatics

Prince Of Persia: TSOT

POP: TSOT took *Tomb Raider's* acrobatic style and ran – up the wall – with it, taking its physical challenges and adding a more free-flowing flourish. We want that, urban-styled.

Dev notes:

The graphics engine

Making life harder for our developers and accountants, the development of a bespoke graphics engine will probably be required to realise The Perfect Game. While middleware technology is now the best choice for a great many projects – the 3D *Grand Theft Autos* used Criterion's RenderWare – the sheer versatility required here suggests only a hand-coded engine will pass muster.

Consider the requirements: The Perfect Game demands a thirdperson view with *Half-Life 2*-surpassing levels of detail, and rich, interactive environments – internal and external – more redolent of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *MGS3* than *GTA*.

Helping out on the display side will be Xbox 360's ATI-designed GPU. With DirectX 9, shader 3.0 functionality, it will handle all the visual fidelity our artists can throw at it. Creating a sufficient volume of detailed art will probably be more of a challenge than displaying it; The Perfect Game's development team will need to break new ground in semi-automating this process, and possibly look to generate rooms, furniture and even inhabitants on the fly, in-game, on demand.

Technically, the line between polygons and pixels will be blurred in the next generation. The Perfect Game's engine will employ a range of pixel-shader filters and mappings to achieve an approximation of raytracing techniques, as well as manipulate surfaces and geometry at a near-invisible polygon level.

It's possible that Epic's latest Unreal Engine 3 – which appears to handle every kind of environment and object well – could meet the challenge. It would certainly make The Perfect Game's publisher happier, since this ambitious project is risky enough already. An off-the-shelf engine component could swap the question mark of in-house engine development with a hard dollar-value middleware license fee, although a strong team of coders would undoubtedly still need months to tune the package for our purposes.



Interactive audio

Special feature 4

79 **Au** Audio

Rez

The Perfect Game will deconstruct Nobuo Uematsu's powerful soundtrack and reassemble it, *Rez*-style, in play. Driving above a certain speed, say, might introduce a new theme, but even firing or running up stairs will add musical overtones. At critical moments, the orchestra will come together in grand style.



RPG elements

87 **Ff** RPG

Deus Ex 2

By definition, unscripted encounters generated on the fly can hardly have benefited from the finely tuned design of *Hitman's* set-pieces. But adding *Deus Ex 2's* limited RPG element will help encourage players to solve problems in different ways, without a designer in sight.



Overall structure

62 **Su** Structure

Elite

While there will be several story arcs, there will be no concrete win or loss. Instead of a score, you'll see how you're progressing by various states – how people treat you, what they ask you to do, and so on. It will never be clear to players how far they have reached in the game.

OUT OF THE MYSTS

AN AUDIENCE WITH RAND MILLER ON THE MOVEMENT, MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MAGIC BEHIND THE MYST SERIES

Even **Rand Miller** himself can't quite place how he and his brother Robyn's serene, surreal adventure through worlds written inside books to save a prodigal father from his errant sons caused quite the commotion it did. But 1993's *Myst* was a phenomenon, spurring their quickly-growing Washington studio Cyan on to its even more visually striking 1997 sequel, *Riven*. After *Riven*'s release, Robyn would leave Cyan, and Cyan would leave *Myst* proper in the hands of other developers – with two further sequels developed out-of-house – to pursue the six-year development of *Uru*, a massively multiplayer adventure drawing on *Myst*'s mythos. Only *Uru*'s singleplayer component would see widespread release, though, as cost and subscription issues resulted in the online aspect's cancellation. Now, Cyan has returned to *Myst* to pen its closing chapter, *End Of Ages*: we spoke to Rand Miller about the stories behind his stories.

How does it feel to come back to direct involvement with *Myst* at the cycle's end?

The first ones were my favourite experience, because just a few guys in a garage is a magical thing. We have a company of amazingly talented people now, and you can accomplish so much when you have that behind you, but I look back at that small group fondly. There are mixed emotions for *Myst V* – we had put so much time and energy into *Uru*, such an amazing amount of challenges to overcome. So it was a change going back into an actual *Myst* game, especially the fastest *Myst* game that anyone's produced, and after two other companies had done great jobs on them. It was rough going in, but I love having my hands back on it, to finally get around to answering your question. I'll be honest: at some points I think I'm getting too old for this. It needs younger, energetic people to fill in, and hopefully we're setting those people up within the company for when they need to.

Is it a difficult design process to create gameworlds that are also puzzles?

It's an iterative process, because there's a lot of things that feed into it, that feed off each other. You have the story and the space and the puzzles all evolving, it's a very fluid kind of design process. It feels a bit architectural… which oddly enough as I say it doesn't sound fluid to me at all, but maybe that's just how you document it: in a very architectural way. It's a very satisfying experience for me because I enjoy all those aspects – the puzzles, coming up with interesting visual ideas, and the story. It's wonderful, and exhausting, too. I've said this before, but it's about throwing away 99 per cent of your ideas, catching the good ones and building on those.

Has the cut-off remained that harsh, or can you settle into a run of useable concepts?

No, no, no, it's always the one per cent. Oh my gosh, you can never just get it all to work. I think it's the chiselling away of the rough edges, even on that one per cent, that finally gives you the good stuff. You throw away the 99 quickly – 'Is this good? No. How about this? No. How about this?' – so it's not like you have to draw everything. But the one per cent that gets everyone around the table interested, then you start chiselling away at it and come up with, hopefully, a diamond in the end.

Myst V was the toughest of the lot for us in terms of the time involved: there's a lot of work to throw away ideas and chisel and build all in a little over a year. It's funny what the challenges ended up being with realtime 3D – I wanted people to be able to play with a mouse and one button, so we thought: 'We'll just put the classic click-and-move interface in, no problem'. But it was a *nightmare*. I still don't know that we got it right, but we at least got it to a point where my mom could play the game, and if my mom can play a realtime 3D game, that's unusual these days. There's still room for innovation there, but I like the fact that it's inclusive.

During development of *Riven*, you said the two complaints about *Myst* were that it was too hard and too easy. How do you go about being inclusive to both sides?

I think over the years we've come to realise that just by the sheer luck of it, we managed to strike a balance with *Myst* that pleased two kinds of people – those who enjoyed puzzles and those who enjoyed exploring. And the puzzle players found it too easy, and the explorers found it too hard. The question moving forward was which group we were going to cater to in the sequels, and I think we've tended to lean toward the puzzle group. I'm not sure that was the right way: it could very well be that the larger group of people were the ones who just enjoyed exploring, to whom puzzles were just a pain that they never even got past. That said, we have a legacy to live up to, so we can't throw away everything, but we've tried to go back to not being too hard. Even some of the puzzle players have said, 'I need to use the hint guide these days', and that's just ridiculous.

"IT'S ABOUT THROWING AWAY 99 PER CENT OF YOUR IDEAS, CATCHING THE GOOD ONES AND BUILDING ON THOSE… IT'S THE ONE PER CENT THAT GIVES YOU THE GOOD STUFF"

Some of *Riven*'s puzzles, which span not just locations but the entire game, spring to mind.

[Mimes putting gun to temple] Yeah, the biggest mistake we made in *Riven*… We always look back at what we did right and wrong, and we're always experimenting, even with this last game – if people don't like it, I want to know what they don't like. With *Riven* in particular I think having puzzles that weren't self-contained on the individual islands was a mistake. Even when we were working on it, it felt a little iffy, and I've come to believe that people need contain.ment in order to know that they've finished with the universe they're working in. We stumbled on that in *Myst*: it was perfect that each Age was self-contained. Another thing that was unfortunate was that we thought the idea of islands in *Riven* would be as satisfying as *Ages In Myst*, and it's not. Even though it's a subtle thing, and those islands are unique, we didn't understand the power of linking between Ages –

BEAUTIFUL AND DELIBERATE





Story has always been at the heart of *Myst*: the HyperCard flick-book structure of the original game seemed as much a part of its conceit as the introduction, where the player discovers a book named Myst, containing a world – an Age – written into existence. Inside, in the summer retreat (or prison gulag) of Myst Island, were clues to the fates of the extinct civilisation that created this art of writing, the D'ni, and of the family of scholars, explorers, tyrants and refugees that continued it. Settling the family quarrels – little, world-destroying matters of pride and presumption, as these things so often are – would continue after *Myst* across the dying beauty of *Riven*'s archipelago, then further Ages of the D'ni past and the newcomers' future. While the presentation would grow more intricate throughout the series – still shots transformed into panoramic views, then richly animated, and finally rendered in realtime 3D – the storytelling remained direct and simple: written, spoken or carved in the structure of a score of Ages. They were surprisingly melancholy tales for a mainstream success, with characters lost to their obsessions and fabulous worlds lost to time – an impermanence which makes the player both tourist and chronicler, yet always themselves. Never directly referred to with anything more defining than 'friend' or 'stranger', yet the deus ex machina to all *Myst*'s plots, the games' success came not just from having stories at their heart, but stories waiting for players to write themselves into.



In addition to press duties, Miller was also due to attend a Somerset primary school, where teacher Tim Rylands' use of *Myst* titles as a springboard for creative writing and expression – drawing 1,000 words back out of the games' imagery – has garnered awards

of moving between different worlds, and how that affected people psychologically.

So was *Myst*'s crossover success almost a chance encounter?

Some of it was serendipitous: we were there at the right time, when the CD-ROM industry was looking for something to grab on to. And I remember having meetings with Robyn talking about the balance of the gameplay, but I don't know that we could have balanced it as well as we did without some good old luck. But the part that wasn't... I often say that we stumbled on to things, but I've recently gone back and looked at the original design documents, and a lot of it was very intentional. We said things like we'd try to make it appeal to a broader group, to take out dying so that people don't feel like they have to start over, to integrate the puzzles into the environment a little better – all the things people enjoyed. Over the years I kind of lost track and thought we lucked out on them, rather than them being things we instinctually wanted to do.

You also proved that a fantasy title could achieve mainstream success – was that an intent of the design?

I think it helped that it was a *new* fantasy, not the same old fantasy worlds that have served so well many times over. This one was hard to place, and that drew you in. The key, in my mind, is always the aspect of wondering what's around the next corner. The power of *Myst* and its ability to attract people was because anyone could sit down and – until they hit a puzzle – could continue to click to see what was around that next corner. Everything about what we did made you wonder what would come next, and that included the fantasy element: it was intriguing, it pulled you forward.

***Myst* always seemed a very linguistic fantasy, deeply tied into words, books and language.**

The whole language was a tremendous amount of trouble, and it would have been easier to throw out some nonsense words or base it on English and switch the characters around. But we've got, oh my goodness, root words that tie back to the whole history of the D'ni civilisation and how it interfaces with human history – how the languages affected each other. If we need a new word we can go back and say: 'OK, it's kind of like this and this put together'. And that just feels right, it feels like the way you should do it if you're building a real place. Maybe it's because we're crazy enough to keep thinking it *is* a real place. Which is fun.

Did being a part of a strong, extended family, rather than the game developer stereotype of a brilliant loner, play a part in making *Myst*'s central narrative that of a cosmic dysfunctional family?

[Laughs] People have often said, you know: 'Boy, you must have had a dysfunctional family, because you sure did a good job of portraying one'. I've always thought of my family as very functional, but like you say, maybe having that grounding lets you see the contrast. Part of it is that dysfunction is more fun than function. It gives you monsters who aren't monsters – people who have issues and are 'bad' with reasons, and histories, and lets you feel understanding and mercy for them. There *are* no monsters: there just aren't. Real life has terrible people who've done terrible things, who you need to have a balance of feelings for. Anything we can do to map the game to real life makes it stronger.

How has the series' cultural success – catching the eye of the mainstream press, being evangelised beyond the gaming community, even being used for teaching purposes – affected you as a creator?

The impact it's had above and beyond the game is wonderful. The most satisfying thing is watching kids with it, and the most humbling aspect is to think that there could be kids who played the games and were inspired to do something better. I keep thinking of us as kids when we read CS Lewis, or Tolkien, or saw Star Wars, how it gets inside you and makes you want to pursue it. Maybe we won't have that sort of impact, I don't know, but I really want to see those things – I hope I'm still alive when somebody says: 'I was inspired by *Myst* and I made this'. That would be incredible.

"WE WERE THERE AT THE RIGHT TIME, WHEN THE CD-ROM INDUSTRY WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO GRAB ON TO"

At the time, many ardent 'non-gamers' reported losing themselves in *Riven* for days on end, documenting it with the precision of an archaeological dig.

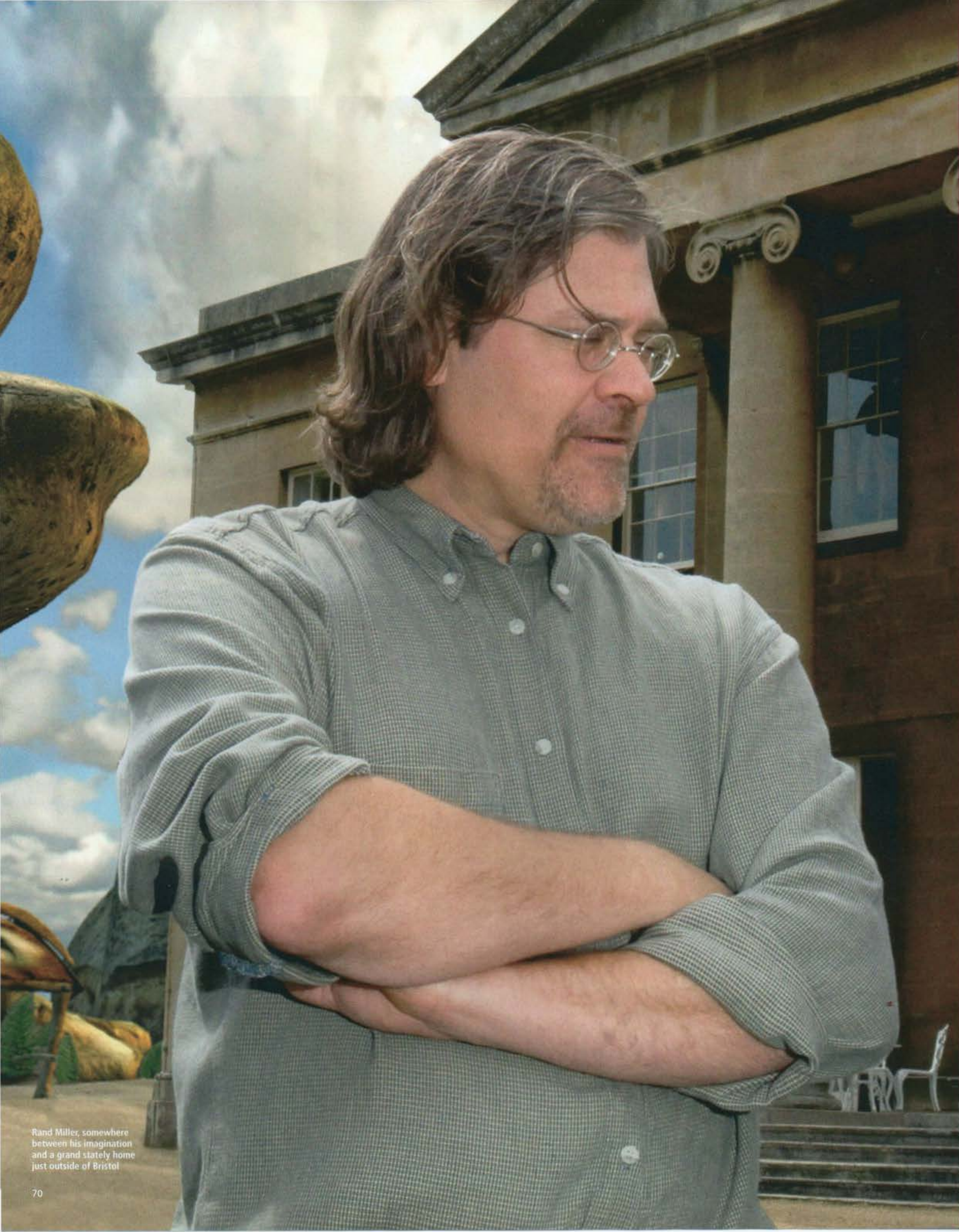
That's awesome. Yeah, for the people *Riven* clicked with, it was the best. There was *so much* detail in there – the kind of detail that we might never have the luxury of putting in a game again, because all the money we made from *Myst* just went right back into it. And that was so cool. As much as we made a couple of errors with it, the richness there is at every single turn is amazing, for the people who get it. I just wish *Riven* wasn't so difficult, because even some pretty big *Myst* fans were like: 'Come on, I can't remember all this stuff'. The final puzzles that involve drawing on so much, with the marbles and the colours and putting it all together – there were some really strong mental leaps you had to make. There's some elements I love in those puzzles, but they were just so difficult.

On the other hand, *Myst*'s treatment in the gaming press became progressively more negative, the game dismissed as an









Rand Miller, somewhere between his imagination and a grand stately home just outside of Bristol

'interactive screensaver' regardless of its depths. Was that demoralising?
The gamers were the ones who made *Myst* what it was – they were the first to buy it and get it going. Looking back, I think *Myst's* sales lasted so long, and the gaming press was so used to cutting-edge stuff, that they were looking it and asking: 'How can this still be selling?' And then *Riven* came out with similar technology, and so I think that caused some of the backlash. And rightly so – maybe we weren't pushing technology as much as the rest of the industry – but we were using the technology to create the world, rather than deliver the world. It would have been interesting to do *Riven* in realtime 3D, but it would have been terrible, because it *had* to be the way it was. We wanted those images to be indistinguishable from photographs, we wanted you to think you were seeing photographs of real places. When you look back at *Myst*, it's visually questionable, but *Riven* was there.

So it'd be hard to complain about the gaming press at all. I think with the new game they'll be more willing to give us a shot. And actually, I'm intrigued by stuff like *Half-Life 2*: I loved the whole first area of it where no one shoots at me, I don't shoot at anybody and I'm wandering around experiencing this world, even if it becomes a shooter later. And it's intriguing to have that feeling... a kind of *Myst*-like feeling, though nobody in the gaming press would say that! The whole adventure category – it's unfortunate that it's called the adventure category – I think can grow more into that area. I'd love to see a game like *Half-Life 2* that had a very rich story, and some very fantastic places, and didn't depend on the gameplay *system* to make it entertaining.

It's interesting that the two biggest crossover successes of our time – *Myst* and *The Sims* – both failed to repeat that success when brought online.
There's a part of me that thinks *Uru* didn't really get a shot – we had a good number of people signed up for beta, and it was very low-risk from a publisher's point of view, because we had carried most of the burden and development effort. Another six months would have been interesting for *Uru*, but we couldn't afford it. I still don't think we did anything wrong with it.

Unfortunately it's going to cost somebody a lot more to move in this direction than it cost us, because they're going to have to start from scratch again. We had the perfect universe to do it in, that we could just come out with new Ages, new places to explore. It fit well. Maybe it would have gone the way of *The Sims*, but it would have been better off for everybody if we had a definitive answer, rather than spending a lot of time and money and still not knowing.

So what does life after *Myst* hold for Cyan?
Well, starting with a clean slate is interesting. We've got several concepts: the first one we developed, Latus, is very new, it's a whole new kind of interactive entertainment, but I'm not sure it'll ever see the light of day. It's very risky, although it's not that big – but there's no way to predict how many units it will sell, and publishers don't like that. We were hoping that people would remember what we did with *Myst*, and think this had the same feeling and jump on it – but because of the development costs now, the process isn't the way it used to be. When we took *Myst* to publishers, I remember sitting in a room and one of the guys said: 'This is good, we should get this', and the other said: 'OK'. Now it's: 'This is good...'

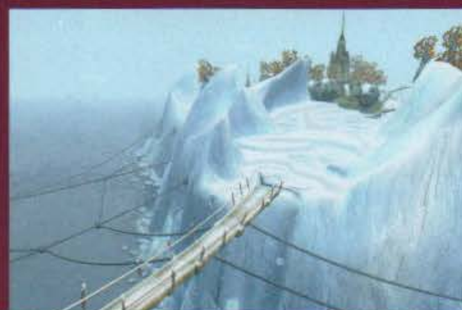
'...let's run it past marketing'.
[Laughs] Yeah, you might as well just stab and turn it. From a development point of view it's hard because we're trying to innovate, but if I'm in marketing and you show me something that's never been sold before, I'm not going to give you a number. It's just unfortunate, and I wish there was a better system.

Anyway, that's our risky concept, and we have another that in my mind is a no-brainer. It would sell a lot of copies, and it would sell to people who buy games now. You could call it an action-adventure game, but with a Cyan twist. Both concepts have a lot of excitement about them within the company, so it all depends on publishers now: if they pick one up we'll do it, and if they don't, I'll go on a long holiday [laughs].

Which project would you rather work on, given the opportunity?
Aaaah. It would be a hard... Hmm. I'd love to do both, and I think they're so different that we could set up two development teams and it would work very well. The second could cover the risk of the first – it's a lot of interesting twists and stories and fun stuff, and people won't even know it came from the guys who did *Myst*. But Latus, I'd sure like a shot at that one, to develop it more. There's something about it that feels like it could be massmarket interactive entertainment, and I love that feeling. A lot of it has to do with story, it still has to do with story. Stories are the way people are used to being entertained: that's what they respond to, that's what they love, and the more you can put that into your product, the more chance you have of appealing to the mass market. We'll see. If nobody buys into it, at some point we'll just tell people what we were doing, and somebody else can run with it.

"I'M INTRIGUED BY STUFF LIKE HALF-LIFE 2: I LOVED THE WHOLE FIRST AREA OF IT WHERE NO ONE SHOOTS AT ME"





Exploring *End Of Ages* with mouse-and-WASD controls comes with a culture shock: one product manager tried to select a rocket launcher

COME AS YOU ARE

Cyan's 2003 release of *Uru* took the universe in a new direction: one with a New Mexico zip code. Set in present-day reality, players are drawn, Close Encounters-style, to the desert where a great Cleft leads to the subterranean city of the D'ni. Players are still invited to be themselves, but with thirdperson avatars rather than incognito observers – character creation revelled in the ordinary: freckles, skewed noses, casual wear and trainers. If the singleplayer illuminated some of the series' mysteries, *Uru's* focus was to be multiplayer, where groups would move in to the deserted city and together return it, and countless Ages, to life. A staggered beta saw small numbers of players invited in, equally frustrated and wide-eyed, while the launch date slipped, fluttered, and was cancelled in 2004.

Copious content intended for online distribution was released as singleplayer material in two expansions: "It seems almost obscene how much content you get in [the collected *Complete Chronicles*] for, I don't know, ten dollars?" reflects Miller. But the community that had experienced the online beta together was heartbroken – not at the loss of levels or items, of which *Uru* had none, but of the society they had forged from human relationships and fantastic myth. As recompense, Cyan released a free download, *Until Uru*, allowing players to run *Uru* server shards. Though these shards can't expand and evolve as intended, it seems fitting, if bittersweet, to leave *Uru's* community with a score of miniature universes frozen in time.





MICRO MACHINES

They're new but old, small but absolutely massive. We find out why...









The original *Mortal Kombat* in the Argos catalogue. A new Atari console in HMV. It might have gamers of a certain age nervously checking the date on the newspaper, but this retro pandemic isn't really about gamers at all. It's about a demographic that's usually off doing other things – the fabled 'mainstream' – embracing old games wrapped in a console concept that's about as 'retro' as it comes. Plug – and play.

The success story of low-price, instant-fix retrogaming began inauspiciously with Toymax's Activision 10-in-1 in April 2001 – ten Atari 2600 games built into a $20 TV-connectable joypad. It wasn't the first nostalgic videogame toy (Toymax itself had licensed Nintendo's Game & Watch for a 1999 series of LCD keyrings), and it came after Radica's novelty sports-based plug-and-plays. But it was a smart move: a joypad full of memories that plugged straight in to the TV.

Trapped inside America's Avon catalogue, though, it achieved little before Toymax was swallowed whole by Jakks Pacific in October 2002. This Malibu toy giant was founded by two former directors of THQ – but with its sights fixed on Toymax's lucrative Lazer Challenge toys, Jakks paid little attention to either the Activision gadget, its half-completed Atari follow-up, or the plans for a Namco edition.

Fast-forward three years, and the rebranded Plug It In And Play TV Games have sent Jakks' fortunes skyrocketing. Led by the million-selling Namco and Ms Pac Man joysticks – but embracing over 20 lines from SpongeBob SquarePants to World Poker Tour – TV Games earned Jakks $66 million in one 12-month period, and were at one point America's top-selling toy. Having spotted the potential in these digital morsels of '80s culture, and corrected Toymax's mistake of using generic green joypads, Jakks is capitalising on an its audience's enormous craving for quick-fix videogame

Clone wars



The 'NES-on-a-chip' has spawned hundreds of so-called 'Famiclones' – cheap, mainly Asian, devices that resemble anything from a Famicom controller to a PSP, and come crammed with NES games (some are also compatible with original cartridges). There are legal clones – Color Dreams, publisher of several unlicensed titles in the '90s, licensed its entire NES back catalogue for the Rumble Station, while Gametech's handheld PocketFami (above) has recently been introduced to the UK – but many are awash with Nintendo intellectual property. Nintendo's dedicated anti-piracy team is cracking down, and in April 2004 made great play of an FBI-assisted bust on pirates allegedly distributing 'Power Player' devices featuring *Duck Hunt*, *Donkey Kong* and more. But the ease with which it's possible to find market stalls selling '100-in-1' gadgets that play *Mario Bros* and *Balloon Kid* suggest this is a war that Nintendo is some way from winning.



◄ KONAMI TV ARCADE: ARCADE ADVANCED

It might share a name and line-up with 2002's excellent GBA package, but the similarities end there. Developer Majesco has taken the path of least resistance: rather than reprogram Konami's arcade games for the NES-style chip inside the TV Arcade, it has simply resurrected the original NES conversions wherever possible. As a result, *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and *Gyruss* (with its 'improved' visuals) are unbearably ugly – and *Rush 'n Attack* especially is a brutal reminder that Konami's washed-out home conversions of its coin-op classics represented a backwards step rather than any kind of 'advance'. *Frogger* and *Time Pilot*, surprisingly never released on NES, have been specially reprogrammed, and play passably in spite of the best efforts of the joystick's grossly distended head. But *Frogger*'s happy medley of hummable tunes has been inexplicably ditched in favour of a new and forgettable song.

► ATARI TV GAMES

Vendel claims that Jakks wouldn't talk to him for years after he rubbished this TV Game: we are forced to tempt the same fate. The Atari TV Games' loyalty to the Atari 2600 starts and finishes with the iconic CX40 replica casing. Beyond that, there's an inept error at every turn – ping-pong bats scrolling off the top of the screen and returning at the bottom in *Pong*; Warren Robinett's legendary hidden message in *Adventure* replaced with the word 'TEXT'; and the inclusion of games like *Circus Atari* and *Breakout* that are flawed without paddles. In fairness, it isn't as apocalyptically bad as some Atari obsessives have claimed: titles like *Centipede* and *Real Sports Volleyball* are fine save for an odd flickering pixel glitch. But the Atari Paddle and the Flashback 2 aren't quite as adept at defecating on your memories.



clichés: munching dots, blasting spaceships, bouncing balls.

Cost is king: at £20-30 a throw, TV Games are cheap and impulsive enough to do the business in chemists and gadget shops. "The market was initially fuelled by people in their 30s or 40s or even 50s," says **Anson Sowby**, director of marketing of TV games at Jakks. "They grew up playing games, but aren't prepared to splash out on a PlayStation. Our strongest outlets are Wal-Mart in the US, Argos in the UK – massmarket retailers, not your hardcore gamer destinations." He still sounds shocked. "When it all kicked off in 2003, we literally could not manufacture them quick enough to meet demand."

Sowby's surprise is typical for an industry that still can't quite believe its luck. The two Intellivision plug-and-plays – second to market not long after Toymax – are on course to overtake the two million Intellivisions originally sold by Mattel. Atari approached a million pre-orders for its Flashback 2, the sequel to the resurrected VCS that brought the company back into the hardware business nine years after the final Jaguar limped off the production line. Meanwhile, the Commodore 64 Direct-To-TV was snapped up by 70,000 television shoppers on its first day.

If you're a modern game studio squirting millions into next-gen development, it can't be fun watching today's mighty brands choke on the dust left by *Pong*. Unless you're HotGen president **Fergus McGovern**, and having the time of your life resurrecting the likes of *Ms Pac-Man* and *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* for Jakks.

"It's been a real joy," says McGovern. "Because of the success, and because of the turnaround. We've been given an opportunity to go from a contract to a finished product far quicker than with console and PC games. Now, it's from design meeting to seeing someone buy our product in a store – all in six, seven months."

HotGen's work, typified by the celebrated Ms Pac-Man TV Game, is largely beyond reproach. But many plug-and-plays – mainly the Atari 2600 revivals – are disappointingly inauthentic once you've taken a crowbar and blowtorch to the hermetically sealed packaging.

Cheap plug-and-plays mean cheap off-the-shelf chips, mainly sourced from Taiwan. Until recently, the most cost-effective solution was a one-chip version of the Nintendo Entertainment System's innards (Western Design Center, whose cores were used in Winbond chips built into early Jakks plug-and-plays, is the legendary owner of the 6502 processor type used in everything from the BBC B to the SNES).

These chips are certainly powerful and versatile enough to match the visuals of, say, *Pitfall!* running on an Atari 2600 (audio is another matter). But whether it can be done right under a tight deadline – and tighter budget – is a moot point.

Some companies got lucky. Sega itself handed Radica a cheap 16bit chip that will obligingly run original Mega Drive code ripped out of carts; the C64 DTV is, famously, built around a Commodore-emulating chip that hobbyist Jeri Ellsworth knocked up in her spare time. Without those luxuries, you're stuck with a generic thumbnail of silicon, a small blob of ROM for game code, and programmers sweating to get those *Phoenix* patterns dead on.

"It was a real challenge," says **Ron Bagley** at Radica, who oversaw development on Arcade Legends Space Invaders. "I had high hopes that Taito would have the original source, or there'd be a TV chip that could handle arcade code. We quickly learned that neither was the case. We were able to extract graphics straight from the code with some games, such as *Phoenix*, but getting things right mainly took simply a huge amount of playtesting. I'm more pleased with some of the games than others."

"It's been a real joy. We've been given an opportunity to go from a contract to a finished product far quicker than with console and PC games. All in six, seven months"



▲ARCADE LEGENDS TETRIS

Delivering four solid versions of 16bit *Tetris* with a quantity of clichéd Russian folk music that easily meets EU requirements, Arcade Legends Tetris comes undone nonetheless, courtesy of a controller concept that should never have escaped a marketeer's mouth. The idea – rotate a raised block to spin the tetronimoes, nudge left and right to move them – makes sense on paper; in practice, it's frustratingly inaccurate, completely lacking the precision that's required to slot blocks into their natural homes. Almost – but not quite – as bizarre and pointless as Radica's tabletop *Tetris* boardgame.



◀ARCADE LEGENDS SPACE INVADERS

This looks and feels terrific: rest it on a table and its giant clicking joystick and meaty buttons go a surprising way to evoking the feel of an arcade cabinet – even if the layout and dayglo colour have little in common with a *Space Invaders* upright.

Odd, then, that the titular title is the least accurate of the five games here: its chunky aliens are likely to raise the eyebrows of those with even the fuzziest memories. The other games fare slightly better, but it's the quality of the games chosen that's the real problem here: *Lunar Rescue* is accurate (if slow) but no fun at all; *Colony 7* is unremarkable; *Qix* is just boring. Thank goodness for *Phoenix*, then: faithful to the original even in its maddening car alarm audio (the Japanese Taito original, that is – Radica was a stickler for accuracy here), and still exhibiting its potent power to humiliate the hardcore.

McGovern, though, blames 'pure laziness' for poor quality conversions, and dedicated 15 people and around six months of work to the upcoming five-title Capcom TV Games, wisely perusing online FAQs to "pick up on things we wouldn't spot." **Curt Vendel**, the producer rushed into a shoddy first edition of Atari's Flashback, demanded to do things 'his way' for the follow-up – which meant redesigning the 2600 into a single custom chip, building new VCS-compatible joysticks, and making surprise calls to ageing coders able to program new games in 6507 machine language. Expensive stuff: but compared to the money, time and resources siphoned into, say, *Driver 4*, it's probably barely worth including on Atari's bank statement.

Collectors and retrogamers may well wail about shoddy coding, and people like Vendel might shove a dummy in their mouths, but the quality of conversions is partly academic. Jakks and Intellivision hit the jackpot by realising that accuracy was worth trading off in exchange for accessibility, appeal and, above all, price. Videogame publishers were selling Collections, Classics and Treasures to the minority who'd already bought into videogames: the toy companies hooked the majority by putting a replica Atari paddle behind a plastic window and promising to bring back your childhood for a couple of notes and the same effort it takes to plug an aerial into a television.

In fact, seeing the *Sensible Soccer* logo plastered all over a big box, cunningly sold (and sold out) with free *Sensi* T-shirts, it's easy to believe rights holders were primed and greedily eager to exploit dormant brands. The truth is that Codemasters had all the Sensible assets "in David Darling's loft somewhere," according to Radica's **Rob Goodchild**. It was the same story elsewhere.

"Take Activision," says **Keith Robinson**, president of Intellivision Productions and a consultant on the plug-and-plays. "It's been around since 1981, but it's gone bankrupt once and moved its headquarters halfway across America. They had no idea they'd even done any Intellivision games. I had to send them copies of their own titles to prove it. We were told by some companies it would cost $10,000 just for lawyers to *find* the original contracts, which exist only on paper, usually buried in boxes in a warehouse somewhere. We've got transcripts of Joan of Arc's trial, but not a 20-year-old contract? Ridiculous."

Cram *Circus Atari* inside a replica Atari paddle and wallets start clicking open everywhere – veteran gamers, collectors, people who haven't pressed Start in years. But the success of retro devices goes, as **Eric Levin** of Intellivision 25 distributor Techno Source puts it, "way beyond retro." And all thanks to people who didn't so miss the golden age of coin-ops, as skip the 20th century entirely.

If you're too young for complex console games, something like *Kaboom!* isn't retro – it's new, simple, weird, different, fun. Especially in the US, plug-and-



▲ACTIVISION TV GAMES

The plug-and-play that started it all has shed its original skin and been dolled up to the nines in a smart-looking joystick (although the 'Toymax presents…' message remains on the menu screen). The ten primitive plucks from the Atari 2600's back catalogue are nowhere near as gratifying as *Pac-Man* or *Galaga*, but these are admirable conversions for the nostalgic: spider-crushing classic *Crackpots* will slowly become an obsession, and *Pitfall!* has never lost its charm – or its challenge. Some graphical glitches are apparent – unless those *Pitfall!* vines are frayed intentionally to reflect their age.

▼ KONAMI TV ARCADE FROGGER

'Yes, even your parents can play!' winks the Konami TV Arcade packaging, and we suddenly feel very old indeed. But depression really kicks in when you switch on: this is simply the Arcade Advanced plug-and-play, with all the games except *Frogger* stripped out. Yet presented at the same price. Mystifying.



◄ ARCADE LEGENDS SEGA MEGA DRIVE VOLUME 1

The entire Sega Arcade Legends range uses a custom-built chip designed by Sega itself, which runs pure, undoctored code of yore. The visuals and play are flawless – the sound less so, although in some ways that's a benefit: the crunch and distortion evokes cheap mono portable TVs and weekends spent in the thrall of sweet 16bit.

The replica joypads (kept slim by a separate box that holds the batteries) are fine, but even clunkier and cheaper to the touch than the Mega Drive's own. As for the games, you don't need us to tell you how much fun *Sonic* is, while *Golden Axe* and *Altered Beast*, the other two big-hitters, exude their old repetitive charm. The rest are fillers, shoehorned into what little space is left on the gadget's 32K ROM chip. Having said that, *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* can't be argued with.



► ATARI FLASHBACK

Producer Vendel wanted six months to do the VCS justice. Atari gave him ten weeks.

Rushed reprogramming has a negligible effect on some of the Neolithic play here (*Canyon Bomber*, for example, is barely a game). But for the majority of Flashback's 30 2600 and 7800 titles, the translation process has transformed classic into clunker. Dodgy collision detection scuppers *Charley Chuck's Food Fight*; *Asteroids* has lost its satisfying inertial drift; Doug Neubauer's stunning *Solaris*, still a rollicking blast on a real Atari, is uncomfortably static and disconcertingly mute. Even the game-selection menu is halfhearted.

Some titles still have a faint pulse – the seminal *Adventure* chokes on diagonal movement, but can still put the fear of God into you with those relentless ducks (sorry, dragons). And the retooled Atari 7800 controllers are comfortable and responsive, even if modelling the Flashback on the unloved 7800 in the first place was a bizarre choice to make.



plays are finding their way into children's hands through sentimental parents (the same ones eagerly handing their confused kids new generations of He-Man and My Little Pony toys), and into the lucrative children's gift market through mums and dads who prefer a $20 games gadget they understand to a $150 console they don't.

"It seems what's happening is that adults remember the Intellivision name and buy it for their kids," says Robinson. "We've had a lot of letters from parents – they've got an SUV with a little TV in the back, they plug the Intellivision 25 into it and these five-year-old kids are playing it for the whole trip. It helps," he adds, "that the parents know Intellivision means fun arcade games. They don't have to worry about violent content, sexual content." Robinson, like many of his counterparts, believes that the Intellivision, Atari VCS and *Ms Pac-Man* have returned from the grave to save gaming from itself – arriving with wholesome and reassuringly familiar entertainment at just the right time to catch parents sent reeling by Hot Coffee and Hilary Clinton. Perhaps they're right – the Namco TV Games smashed sales records on that televisual bastion of middle America, QVC. But it's an amusing sign of how far we've come if the acceptable face of videogaming includes an uncensored plug-and-play rendition of *Mortal Kombat*.

Interestingly, the perceived demand for little games with big pixels – and the belief that videogaming's drive for 3D left behind an underexploited and unevolved 2D market – is spawning 'faux retro' plug-and-play – a Coleco-badged gadget with generic games rather than anything authentically retro, for example, and games in the Intellivision *style*, aimed at little hands that can't cope with an Xbox joypad (and big hands weary of exhausting 50-hour RPG treks).

But 'real' retro ploughs on. Although Jakks recently expressed surprise and disappointment that 'hardcore gaming' TV Games like EA Sports and Mortal Kombat did not sell, the manufacturers know that the nostalgic itch can withstand constant scratching. Radica, Commodore and Jakks are all preparing new or tweaked plug-and-plays which will take us well into 2006. Feel what your tummy does when you learn that Jakks is developing a TV Games version of Atari's 1983 *Star Wars* coin-op – that's just the sensation that will drive the business forward even as the pile of retro joysticks in people's homes brushes against the ceiling.

Indeed, the toy companies are bullish about taking on console manufacturers and media companies that are keen to fill a bigger slice of the retrogaming piechart in their own colours. "The videogame business has always been about catering to the hardcore," says Bagley. "Now they're looking for a wider audience, and they've realised that, in the short-term, classic games appeal to a casual audience. Hence Revolution, Xbox Live Arcade. In the long-term, I think they'll go back to creating the kind of game that's approachable and attractive for the mass market. But right now, for the big console manufacturers, classic games are just a means to an end."

> "The videogame business has always been catering to the hardcore, but right now, for the big console manufacturers, classic games are a means to an end"

For others, it's the means to a new beginning. The booming market for digital memories has led one unnamed manufacturer to enter into initial talks with Vendel about a complete relaunch of its old console. "We're talking about selling the system and the games separately," he says. "Games as packs, on cartridges that use modern flash media." He also reveals there's "a new Atari product on the drawing board" that addresses the same idea.

Revolution and Xbox 360 going head to head with a resurrected console last seen 20 years ago? The Argos catalogue is about to get even more interesting.



◀ MORTAL KOMBAT TV GAMES

Kudos to Jakks for recreating the button layout of the original *MK* coin-op – even without the joystick and oversized buttons, this TV Games turns the arcade controls of Midway's bad-taste ballet of digitised drubbing into the perfect fit for handheld play. The conversion is good, too: loading pauses in Endurance matches and missing bits of background testify that the cheap plug-and-play chips are being pushed to the absolute limit, but this is still an admirably successful attempt to squeeze several grand of coin-op into one $20 box. Head-to-head play – possible with another unit and the included link lead – mean that *MK* once again wins over our hearts and spines.



▶ ARCADE LEGENDS SENSIBLE SOCCER PLUS

Purists might protest that Sensible Software's genius is best enjoyed on the platform where it belongs, but these Megadrive conversions – again, flawless on Sega's custom-built chip – retain the Amiga magic. The goals and glory of *Sensible Soccer* are as dizzyingly brilliant as ever (the two joypads in the box help make *Pro Evo* a memory for a while). *Cannon Fodder*'s stripping of realtime strategy down to its underwear and *Mega-Lo-Mania*'s masterful God gaming are undeserving of the 'bonus game' tag on the box.

This Arcade Legends was something of a personal mission for Radica UK's Rob Goodchild, who acted as its evangelist before sceptical US bosses. When asked if he has designs on other '90s gems, he responds with a simple, "Yes."



▲ NAMCO TV GAMES

Hats off to Jakks' design team: the packaging for its TV Games range is exquisite and guaranteed to turn the heads of young and old. The games aren't perfect (*Pac-Man* obsessives won't be pleased to learn that the patterns etched into their brain are no use here), but developer HotGen has done a decent job, with a speed and feel that's loyal to the originals. The audio is a lost cause, though – *Bosconian*'s 'Alarm! Alarm!' and gut-rumbling explosions are gone, and the whistle of a descending *Galaxian* is now in xylophone territory.

The real problem: the joystick. The microswitch feel is fine – if you've chuckled at purists for suggesting *Dig Dug* just isn't right with a modern joypad, give this a go and repent. Amazingly, movement is restricted to four directions: so if you want to move diagonally in *Bosconian*, designed for eightway play, prepare for a shock. Unforgivable. The unit is also available as a hard-to-find and barely publicised 'Pocket Edition', which still requires a TV but is made to be carried in your trousers.



◀ INTELLIVISION 25

Unpleasant to the touch and torture for the eyes, the cheap casing gets the Intellivision 25 off to a bad start (the cheaper ten-game version is less offensive). Switch on, and things don't improve. Aficionados of Mattel's likeable console will run out of paper listing the inaccuracies in visuals, audio and play that suck the fun out of Intellivision patron saints such as *Astro Smash* and *Space Armada* – Intellivision's own homepage intentionally quotes a review that warns off the nostalgic. Without the 16-direction control of the original system's odd control disc, many games are ruined; without the numeric pad and overlays, the appeal is dimmed. It's true 'NES-on-a-chip', too – reportedly, the code inside this gadget has been found to run perfectly on NES emulators. You can bet George Plimpton is turning in his grave.

Hack attack



The hacking community has swarmed locust-like on the compact chipwork at the heart of plug-and-plays, tweaking and soldering to create new from new-old. Scene celebrity Ben Heckendorn hooked an LCD screen and cartridge connector up to Radica's Sonic gadget and a handheld Mega Drive was born. The C64 DTV, too, has emerged from operating tables with new appendages: power supplies, keyboards, disc drives. Commendably, the manufacturers have embraced the tinkerers rather than disowned them, pioneering the use of increasingly hacker-friendly architecture. The Flashback 2, for example, is fully compatible with old VCS games and designed expressly to allow hackers to solder in their own cartridge slot. (Atari refused to have this capability active out of the box due to the hassle involved in fielding customer calls about old carts.)

▼ ARCADE LEGENDS STREET FIGHTER II

Capcom was always (rightfully) confident that home conversions of its blockbusting coin-ops would sell at any cost, and happily gorged on ROM without fretting about the hard-to-swallow pricetag of the final cartridges. That explains the anorexic two-game lineup of *Street Fighter II Champion's Edition* and *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*: it's all Radica could fit in without needing more memory and driving the price up. The shrunken controllers – uncomfortable on the thumb but still useable – are harder to explain but, regardless, these ageing arcade treasures are impossible to resist.



◀ MS PAC-MAN TV GAMES

The TV Games of champions. The colour might be more Lawrence Llewelyn-Bowen than its predecessor, but the angles are much easier on the palm. As for the games, they're not only real nuggets from the 'golden age' – who wouldn't rather have *Galaga* on their telly than *Galaxian*? – but their tiny flaws will only be of concern to those who completed their doctorate in the eye movement of *Ms Pac-Man*'s ghosts. *Pole Position* is the real star: satisfyingly slick, and a spectacular experience thanks to the stick actually rotating to act as a spring-loaded 'steering wheel'. It's sheer genius, and a new perspective on *Pole Position* for anyone who's only ever torn around the track with a pad or keys. Also available is a wireless version which adds *Rally-X* and (eightway, no less) *Bosconian* from the Namco device.



▶ ATARI PADDLE TV GAMES

Available in single- and twoplayer varieties (player one's controller is bulked up for the batteries, so only the latter contains one authentically proportioned paddle), this collection of 13 2600 games offers a kind of electric shock of nostalgia. It's all very well holding, say, a replica Mega Drive joypad, but it's something else altogether to feel the smooth spin of a long-dead controller and watch it reflected in correspondingly slick movement on the TV.

Retro veteran Digital Eclipse can always be relied upon to work its socks off: comprehensive in-game help is available to navigate each game's muddle of multiple game variations, and two excellent arcade ports (*Pong* and *Warlords*) have been thrown in for the sheer hell of it. *Super Breakout* and *Circus Atari* are the best; *Casino* and *Night Driver* the worst – and it's a pity fourplayer *Warlords* isn't possible. Otherwise, flawless: the only downside is the limited (but far from catastrophic) turning circle of the paddle wheels.



▶ COMMODORE 64 DIRECT-TO-TV

The only computer-based plug-and-play to date (soon to be joined Bazix's MSX One-Chip), the DTV finds a natural home in the UK, where cheap micros are remembered with a fondness that makes consoles sulk.

Housed in a replica Kempston Competition Pro 5000 – naturally – the leaf switches were broken in our sample, which really is a step too far on the quest for authenticity. The DTV's only real shortcoming is a lack of head-to-head play. International Epyx hits mingle with local Hewson heroes, all emulated to perfection by Jeri Ellsworth's silicon implant, crisper than you may remember via the composite inputs, and lightly reprogrammed (by Glasgow-based DC Studios) only where the lack of keyboard requires it.

At £1 per game, plus unlockable treats including homebrew titles and full Commodore BASIC, this would score highly if Zzap!64 were still around.



▼ ARCADE LEGENDS SEGA MEGA DRIVE VOLUME 2

If you're of the belief that giddyingly fast Chemical Plant ramp runs and tricky Casino Night pinball chaos mean *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is only rivalled by *Sonic And Knuckles* for the title of best Sonic game – and you should be – then this is likely in your living room already. *Columns* has stood the test of time well, too; *Ecco* less so, betraying popularity achieved on the back of environmentalism's vogue years. *The Ooze*, *Alex Kidd* and *Gain Ground* are all harmless enough, but overall this is the weaker of Radica's *Sonic* twins, with both *Sonic 2* and *Columns* suffering through lack of a second joypad.



▶ ATARI FLASHBACK 2

Despite being rushed to release (due, apparently, to 'retailer demand'), Flashback 2 has had time, resources and money on its side, and ably restores the damage done to memory lane by Flashback 1's wrecking ball.

Flashback 2 is faithful to that '70s Atari vibe: only the substitution of garish orange buttons for the original metal switches is jarring. The joysticks offer a near flawless CX40 experience – the slightly looser feel is arguably an improvement, but those who disagree can plug in their original Atari controllers.

The 40-strong game collection has its fair share of fondly remembered classics, and the improved versions of *Asteroids* and *Pong* are welcome – as are Activision's big two: *River Raid* and *Pitfall*. But specially made sequels and 21st-century homebrew titles have little place sitting here at the expense of missing classics: at best, these new games are pleasant diversions with zero nostalgic value; at worst, they're unnecessary sequels cursed with an unbearably flickery playfield.



▶ ARCADE LEGENDS OUTRUN 2019

Perhaps the *OutRun* licence proper was too expensive. We doubt anyone has nostalgia pangs for *Outrun 2019*, which left even 1993's gamers unmoved with its above-average visuals and below-average play. The big surprise, then: Radica's wheel controller – grip with one hand, steer with the other – works brilliantly (and especially so if you're left-handed). Although, of course, it's a gimmick. The game's response to this ostensibly analogue gadget is distinctly digital.





◀ EA SPORTS TV GAMES

Another Digital Eclipse masterclass: there's no Mega Drive emulator chip inside here, but the seminal *Madden '95* and *NHL '95* are pixel perfect – if it's in the game, it's in the game, as the old saying goes, right down to the oddly tuneful referee's whistle. There's a tumour full of battery growing out of controller one which doesn't make extended play much fun on the fingers, but as this is the first TV Game with battery back-up, throbbing digits can be rested without throwing the Superbowl. Good clean fun.

▶ ARCADE LEGENDS MENACER

'Includes *Ready, Aim, Tomatoes!*' yells the packaging, as though there are people who've been waiting half their lives to relive the experience of throwing pixellated tomatoes about. The novelty of the original Mega Drive Menacer, a laughable shoulder-mounted plastic cannon, couldn't draw attention away from the tedium of the pack-in games. They're no better now, and retain the 'scope' option despite the scope itself being absent. Although the gun is technically capable (only occasionally complaining that "the screen is too dark" and resetting in a sulk), *Pest Control* – which turns your sight into a torchlight – is the only game worth more than a few minutes of your time.



Down the rabbit hole

We grab **Jon Hare**, Sensi mastermind and creative director at Tower Studios, to talk retro revival



It's 1992 all over again, Jon.
There's a big retro buzz at the moment. It's taken me a bit by surprise, to be honest.

Enjoying it?
It's nice – it's refreshing to have the older games in the current market. Especially because the most depressing thing about being a developer is the way games die because formats die. You can't help but be resentful of musicians and authors who have one hit and retire off it.

What's your take on the resurgence?
It's systematic of the fact that no one's got the balls to take the risk on new games. Old licences are safe, you can get numbers on them. These days, no one takes a punt on anything original. It's all safety-first choices. It's frustrating that there are so many untapped areas we can't pursue because publishers are fearful retail won't stock it. It all goes back to the conservativeness of retail.

Why is *Sensi* so fondly remembered?
If you're actually playing football, you can basically pass, run or shoot. That's it. *Sensi* recreates football psychologically – the pace makes it more akin to football as a mental activity, as opposed to *Pro Evo* and *FIFA* which show you what it looks like on the television. Simulating the mental environment, rather than the graphical, is a trick that's been missed by a lot of games for a long time.

So, is it time for a new version?
Sensi is a game you could really push forward on modern technology. *Cannon Fodder* and *Mega-Lo-Mania*, too. Hopefully Radica's stick and the mobile versions prove our old stuff has legs. I've always created new product, but as there's no room for that in the current market...

Have you been knocking on doors?
I went to Japan with one new product – they couldn't do a deal because it was a brand-new idea, which meant they couldn't predict sales numbers. How mad is that?

You can expect the *Sensi* fanmail to come rolling in again, though.
We used to get fantastic fanmail. One guy in Scotland sent a postcard of a Scottish footballer and the simple message: '*Sensible Soccer* – fucking amazing'. Best bit of mail ever.

Review

New games assessed in words and numbers

Now playing

Mojibribon



Careful hours meddling with the game's text-input mode produce katakana raps which never sound quite like the English that inspired them. Fruitless but engrossing.
PS2, SCEI

Battlefield 2



The patches roll out as the squad leader of multiplayer warfare tends to its wounds, though considering how effective a fighting machine it already is, they're closer to grazes.
PC, EA

Rampart



The news of a PSP iteration of *Midway Arcade Treasures* was enough of an excuse to dust down this often-overlooked conversion. We want to play it over wi-fi *now*.
SNES, EA

Show and tell

Why games sound useless but feel wonderful



There are few in the videogame industry who would deny *Ico's* emotional resonance, but try describing its plot to an outsider and their scepticism becomes plain

"Games aren't art because games can't make you cry." You still hear it everywhere, even from people who should know better. Sometimes it's not 'art' but 'culture' or 'important' or 'sophisticated' or 'mature'. The message is always the same: without emotional depth, games will never be taken seriously.

Gamers, when they hear that message, writhe with frustration. Experiencing deep emotional responses is something we've come to take for granted from gaming. This month alone, *Fahrenheit* resets the bar for emotional complexity, forcing you to reveal something of your own instincts as you face conversational challenges and unpredictable events. *Ouendan*, an instant rhythm-action classic from the makers of *Gitaroo Man*, similarly involves you in the lives of its characters, with archetypal stories told with verve and skill via short manga prologues.

But try to explain that to an outsider and you sound like an idiot. Tell someone the plot of *Fahrenheit* and they'll scoff at its X-Files-alike set-up. Show someone the handful of frames that *Ouendan* uses to introduce the story of an overworked secretary with a crush on her boss and they'll shrug at their obvious shallowness.

The problem is that games will always lose out in a side-by-side comparison with books, films and theatre because they have to leave more space for their players than those media have to leave for their audience. It's not that games are entirely active and older artforms are entirely passive: everything has elements of both, although it's clear that games sit toward the interactive end of the spectrum. Nor is it that game stories must always be inherently simplistic to withstand player manipulation. It's because having an active effect on the story amplifies and modulates basic emotions so substantially and so personally that they need to start simply in order to develop. Read *Ouendan's* intros and you're left with something trivial. Play out the game and you'll go through elation, amazement, pride, guilt, jealousy, resentment, amusement, relief, vindication and affection. But even the game's extra-hard mode doesn't match up to the challenge of communicating that experience to a non-gamer without sounding like a chump. Showing and telling is never enough. Playing always is.



Edge's scoring system explained:
1 = one, 2 = two, 3 = three, 4 = four, 5 = five, 6 = six, 7 = seven, 8 = eight, 9 = nine, 10 = ten



FAHRENHEIT

FORMAT: PC, PS2, XBOX (VERSION TESTED) PRICE: £40
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 9 PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: QUANTIC DREAM PREVIOUSLY IN: E132, E148, E150





Hammering away at the shoulder buttons fast enough to keep the meter to the right, and so maintain Lucas' grip, is quite an effort on Xbox triggers (top), but moments of ethereal calm can take your breath away just as easily (above)

One of the first things you notice about *Fahrenheit* is that its characters don't run, they walk. And with a slow, measured stride, too, as if they really are people moving from one side of a room to the other, not hyperactive playthings racing towards another checkbox objective, another bright and noisy gratification. The next, more surprising thing you notice is that you don't mind. You can run, but unless the situation demands it you won't want to, because you won't want to do anything that might break the captivating spell cast by this far-sighted, iconoclastic adventure game.

Fahrenheit is an attempt to consummate the long affair between film and videogames and conceive a hybrid form of interactive fiction, and to pull it off writer/director David Cage needs players to not just suspend their disbelief, but to play in character, turning actors in his paranormal murder-mystery. He secures this with a fair and seductive bargain: you won't shape what happens in Lucas Kane's quest to clear himself of a crime he did commit (a ritual murder while possessed by mysterious forces), but you will shape how it happens at every step, and in persuasive detail. The illusion of choice is as complete as it is shallow, offering instinctive command of the flow of action, conversation and mood but barely troubling the substance of the narrative, at least until the final act.

It's an amazing feat of planning and manipulation. *Fahrenheit* begins with Kane coming to his senses moments after the murder, and uses his internal monologue to impel you, as Kane, to cover his tracks and escape. Daringly, it then immediately asks you to unpick your own work as you assume the roles of investigating police detectives Carla Valenti and Tyler Miles – a contradiction in the goal-oriented terms of gaming, but maybe that is exactly Cage's point. The game switches between these two strands for most of its length, taking time along the way to explore the private lives of protagonist and antagonists alike, as well as indulge in a childhood flashback or two. Gradually, the styles polarise, as Lucas' discovery of dark powers within himself takes a turn towards dramatic supernatural action sequences that contrast with the calmer, more prosaic, but more roundly satisfying detective work.

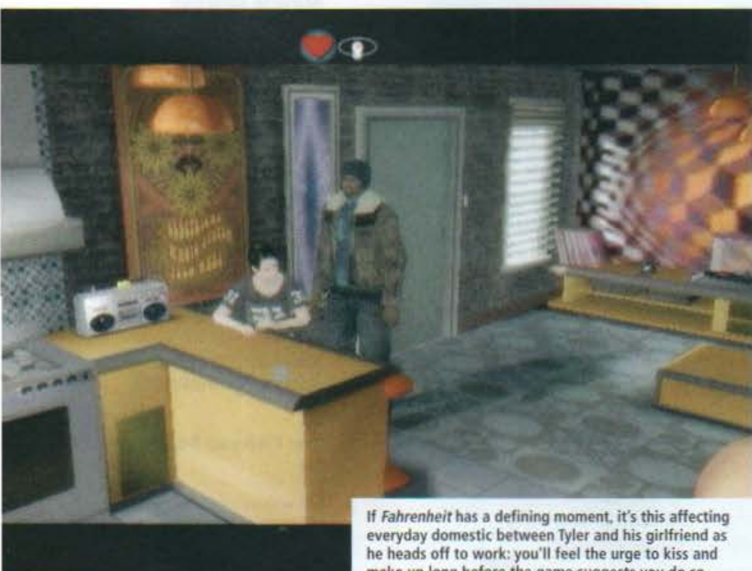


In a less dramatic, more functional use of splitscreen, an inset camera provides a clue, guides you to a destination, or tracks an incoming threat while a timing bar dwindles to nothing

Most moments in this freeform – but still painstakingly guided – sequence of events are triggered by context-sensitive actions on the right stick that can be frustratingly clumsy and counter-intuitive to locate, but once begun are smooth and organically responsive. Your performance changes the feel and detail of the narrative but rarely threatens to bring it to a halt. Conversations always provide a minimum of information, but are much less rigidly structured than the term 'dialogue tree' would suggest. Variously styled quicktime events (see 'On the QTE') are prompted for everything from physical feats to intense concentration, and sensitively tailored to suit. Harsh penalties for failure are rare, except in matters of life or death (where Lucas has a number of lives to spend for quick replays), or lead to Lucas' arrest. The only other way to end the game is to fall into madness: each character has a mood meter that rises and falls according to their fortune, and which can be boosted by tending to their physical and emotional needs.

Immersion is absolutely key to *Fahrenheit*'s success, and every decision has been made, and made well, with this in mind. The game is short, comfortably under ten hours in length, so as not to risk boredom or stretch its fabric so thin you could see through to the workings underneath. Too much pause for thought might snap players back into their own skins, so despite its adventure gaming roots it's not a cerebral challenge, and a timer forces every decision to be made in seconds, by the gut. The mood meter, though structurally superficial, encourages a rare level of engagement with the characters, and the flawed genius of the interface brings immediacy and physical sense to the world (doors, for example, are opened with a push or a pull on the stick depending on which

Despite its adventure gaming roots it's not a cerebral challenge, and a timer forces every decision to be made in seconds, by the gut



If *Fahrenheit* has a defining moment, it's this affecting everyday domestic between Tyler and his girlfriend as he heads off to work: you'll feel the urge to kiss and make up long before the game suggests you do so





Dialogue cues usually relate to subject matter, but in more emotive conversations you can pick your tone. Outright aggression will rarely foul things up: this is an opportunity to direct the scene, not rewrite the story

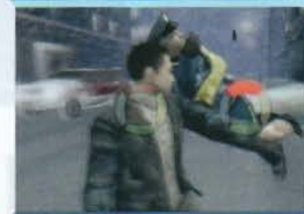


Carla and Tyler have few action scenes; instead, they get their QTE workouts in the gym, on the basketball court – or even on the dancefloor – in some gratuitous but otherwise thoroughly entertaining interludes





On the QTE

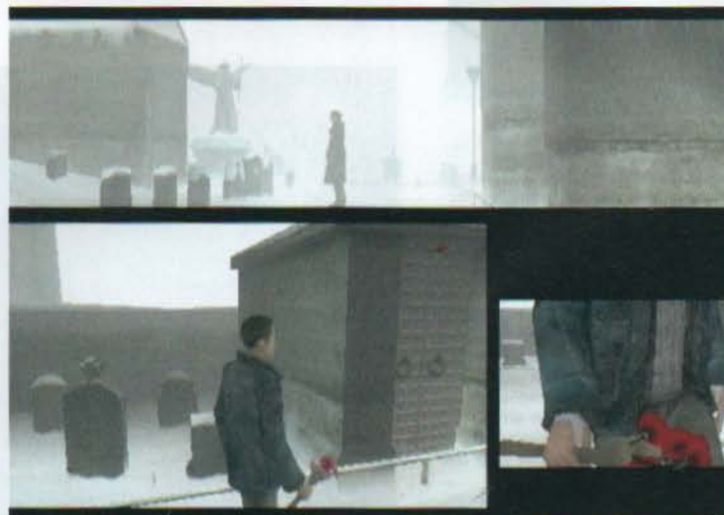


In most matters, *Fahrenheit* is far more streamlined and supple than its obsessively detailed inspiration, *Shenmue*. However, Quantic Dream has substantially elaborated on the quicktime events that game pioneered. There are lengthy, twin-stick Simon-says patterns that strive for the rhythm, direction and intensity of the actions they describe, from complex fight moves to feats of mental rather than physical agility. Frantic, *Track & Field* shoulder-button-bashing accompanies scenes of intense physical effort (and brings a very real adrenaline rush), while a far slower left-right rhythm controls the claustrophobic Carla's breathing during moments of enclosed, firstperson panic. They can frustrate – particularly on the Xbox's deeper triggers – but in bringing a potent physicality to the adventure genre, they're instrumental in *Fahrenheit*'s success.

way they hinge). Most admirably, there's none of the content discrimination usually found in videogames: every element of *Fahrenheit*, be it action set-piece, critical interrogation, comic interlude or romantic subplot, is handled with the same level of care, the same depth of interaction, the same near-flawless technique.

It's almost shocking how seamless, engrossing and accessible *Fahrenheit* is. It's sad, then, that it shows weakness in the one area where it needed to be stronger than any other game: the script. The premise works – despite, or in part because of, the bizarre tension inherent in playing both sides of the story – but Cage's skill with character and structure falls short of his ambitions. Lucas and Carla strive so hard for normality that they ultimately ring hollow; oddly, Tyler, with his stereotypical sidekick tomfoolery and banal girl trouble, outshines them with ease, sealing his stardom with a kiss. As the end of the game nears, lead characters either disappear completely or the credibility of their actions does, and when the story finally yields to player influence it also loses all cohesion, lurching into fantastical non-sequitur and preposterous, ill-founded romance.

Despite this, *Fahrenheit*'s tall tale still manages to satisfy, and you will want to go back and tell it again, no matter how slight the variation in the telling. But the simple fact is that it would be laughed out of any cinema, and better-written stories with more emotional and thematic resonance about more charismatic people have already been told in games, though never so perfectly integrated with them. *Fahrenheit*, it turns out, is only half a revolution. But on balance – bearing its unprecedented achievements in mind – it's by far the better half. **[8]**



One of *Fahrenheit*'s many little shocks of the new, or at least something that's new to videogames, is moving your character simultaneously across multiple cameras. As a film-making technique, this use of splitscreen is now dated, but in games it could not be fresher, and Cage wields it with genuine skill



MAKAI KINGDOM

FORMAT: PS2 PRICE: $50 (£28)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN/US), TBA (UK)
PUBLISHER: NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE

To the uninitiated, Nippon Ichi's tactics are nothing but reproduction: a tweak here and there before releasing yet another dungeon crawl of a strategy RPG that doesn't so much echo *Disgaea* as produce a cover version of it. But, to the initiated, it's tantalisingly clear just how much impact a tweak here and there can have in games with the breadth of detail that *Disgaea*, *Phantom Brave* and now *Makai Kingdom* offer, games where the slightest boost in stats during a character's creation can pay dividends a few hours later.

> It doesn't quite match the lunacy of Disgaea's oddball directions and characters, but is still a multicoloured beacon among its RPG peers

Makai Kingdom, as with previous Nippon Ichi games, isn't so much a reinvention of the turn-based strategy RPG as a transformation of it into an all-you-can-eat buffet, a game with little variety but near-endless scope for cultivating and sculpting characters. Its story is a grateful retreat from the sobriety of *Phantom Brave*, and a hark back to the unbridled quirkiness of *Disgaea*: self-referencing, bizarre and rarely predictable, it doesn't quite match the lunacy of *Disgaea*'s oddball directions and characters, but is still a multicoloured beacon among its RPG peers. In terms of complexity, too, *Makai* has been reeled in somewhat from the confusing class and title systems of *Phantom Brave*, settling more in line with the sleekness of *Disgaea*. But that's not to say its scope hasn't been expanded. Buildings and vehicles can now be introduced to battles, elements that don't feel as substantial as they sound but significantly expand the player's strength and reach in combat, and represent yet another windfall of upgrade possibilities. Regardless, such additions also serve to spruce up the playing field, enlivening it beyond smatterings of just items and characters.

A vital change, however, is that healers and magicians can earn level-based experience from utilising their skills and spells, and no longer have to awkwardly rack up kills in order to keep up with the pack. Also, another rewarding experience reaper is on hand to beef up those low-level stragglers who don't get thrust to the frontline of battles: point bonuses. Players earn points for completing stages, which are cashed in at its end in return for a crescendo of prizes. This feature isn't new, but *Makai Kingdom*'s rewards are rich in EXP, a valuable shortcut and growth hormone for fast-tracking new classes or reincarnated characters (see 'Meddle Of Honor'). But these point bonuses are a boon for another reason: levels aren't cleared by defeating all enemies, but by amassing a certain number of points. Destroying enemies is just one way to gain these, along with pocketing or destroying items strewn across the levels. And this facet becomes an asset during exploration of *Makai*'s major battlegrounds – the Free Dungeons.

Again, this element has an analogue within both *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave*, in that they're 'optional', randomly generated areas that are created by the player and exist independently of the main quest, but are compulsory in terms of farming items, bulking up characters and hunting for



Makai's weapon set is the most colourful of any Nippon Ichi game yet, starring UFOs, fishing rods, boxes, drums, flamethrowers, balloons and even light sabers alongside the clutch of generic swords, daggers, guns and axes. Some offer tremendous stat upgrades



The invaluable Gency Tonic makes a return, an item that can be used to escape a Free Dungeon at any time. Once a dungeon is exited, however, it'll vanish. Divers can be used to descend through 30 levels of a Free Dungeon in one go, or make an escape if fewer than 30 stages remain

Meddle Of Honor



A feature similar to *Disgaea*'s transmigrations and *Phantom Brave*'s class/name option is *Makai*'s reincarnation, something very closely related to the former. It's the key to nurturing brutally powerful characters, a dizzying loop of iterative possibilities that allows characters to change classes while inheriting their former skills. It's a facet that leads to endless sessions of tinkering for the dedicated, but becomes a labour without love for everyone else. It allows, for example, for the creation of warriors with healing skills or specialists in reaping experience – and once the player has progressed to this point, the restrictions of character classes melt away, opening up a continuum of customisation.



As a particular character grows in experience, so the number of characters available in its class expands for the player. With these improvements your base stats rise, and reincarnating a character through certain items can give them multiple boosts









As with all Nippon Ichi RPGs, some ludicrously specific tricks and quirks are on offer for earning gargantuan amounts of experience. That's where the game's attraction lies: the gratification of empowerment, and tending towards omnipotence



Makai's stages are often multi-part, with 'key' items and characters needing to be destroyed in order to unlock any further areas. Some of these extensions are themed – based on the appearance of a certain class of item or vehicle – and are prompted with a charming flash of 2D art

precious weapons and equipment. Indeed, not long into *Makai Kingdom*, it becomes clear that the story mode is just a backdrop, a terminus for those who want some kind of closure to the stat-based micromanagement on offer. Once characters are of a high enough level, Free Dungeons become a rich source of pretty much everything, and have bonus-point requirements that are often mercifully low, allowing players to whizz through them while stopping to mop up the more alluring items and weapons.

There's a difference between intricacy and subtlety, however. Ultimately, *Makai Kingdom* feels more about brutal stat farming than true tactics. Games like *Fire Emblem* push the player to form ever more effective strategies to conquer the just-right pitch of the battles. *Makai Kingdom*'s key strategy isn't so much tactics as just sheer weight of numbers, of accumulation and refinement of character properties. And while it has answered some of the questions raised by past Nippon Ichi titles, there are still those basic barriers to entry that other games see as obligatory – such as an interim save during a lengthy Free Dungeon session. But so few other titles, with the exception of Nippon Ichi's own back catalogue, come close to the intensity of possibility on offer.

This isn't gaming as most games would have it: this is horticulture, a canvas for pruning and accumulating. And it's a game that's best approached as an addiction-in-waiting. To play it any other way – without compulsion, without whole evenings at a time dedicated to the plundering of its depths – means the player won't see the true, sheer scale the game has to offer: an affliction whose only cure lies at the very bottom of a high-level Free Dungeon. To play it any other way is just to skim it, to scratch it, and *Makai Kingdom* doesn't respond well to such casual advances, offering little nutrition for those who graze upon it. But for however much longer Nippon Ichi can keep reheating this concoction, one thing is certain: *Makai Kingdom* has just the right amount of salt, enough to keep fans – and it's hardly different enough from its predecessors to be aimed at anyone else – rapt until the next in the series. **[8]**



Balloon-wielding characters are quirky, but ultimately priceless. Balloons do little damage, but using one will eject your character from the level, allowing them to collect items before freeing up another slot on the battlefield for a more effective fighter to be inserted



GEIST

FORMAT: GC PRICE: $50 (£28)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (US), OCTOBER (UK) PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: N-SPACE PREVIOUSLY IN: E125, E138, E151

Body snatching



To enter a host, they must first be made vulnerable by frightening them through three stages of stress – indicated by the coloured aura visible around a potential target. This is ordinarily achieved by possessing nearby objects, before turning them against their masters in an often embarrassing pantomime.

Although it soon dawns on you that there's little freedom for experimentation outside the confines of *Geist*'s rigid script, there are still plenty of opportunities for some ghostly mischief and humour – particularly where the game's animal hosts are concerned.

Fluctuating between genuinely interesting and disappointingly incompetent, *Geist*, like its protagonist, suffers from something of an identity crisis – unsure of what it wants to be, where it needs to excel and, inexplicably, oblivious to its own triumphs.

And there *are* triumphs here. *Geist* follows the story of an operative attempting to expose a sinister corporation. Thwarted at the final straight and 'killed', with his soul stolen for nefarious gains, his ethereal form escapes with the new objective of reclaiming his body. To aid you in this task, you have the ability to possess the guards and non-hostile NPCs that roam the corridors making up each stage – giving you the physical presence needed to interact with the world and, often, a weapon with which to defend yourself.

When playing as a ghost, *Geist* reluctantly shows its potential – with a handful of standout moments proving equally compelling and haunting. There's a stark beauty to the world: time is slowed to a crawl, colour is bleached, light exaggerated and, devoid of a weapon, play – both as ghost or unarmed host – is comfortingly pedestrian. Not unlike a point-and-click adventure, you search for clues, analyse the environment for potential areas of interaction and, subsequently, a means of linking them in such a way as to make progress possible.

The out-of-body experiences and non-violent sequences are *Geist*'s main attraction, then – and when it chooses to explore this particular facet it performs admirably. Unfortunately, no sooner does *Geist* suggest it can blossom into something fresh and exciting than it's undermined at every turn by a frustrating insistence on being nothing more than a mundane firstperson shooter. It's here that the game's lack of polish becomes apparent, as glitches (doors which have just been opened miraculously closing when dispossessing a host, or grenades ricocheting off invisible walls, for example) expose themselves with reckless abandon.

Such issues could largely be ignored if it wasn't for the fact that they eventually encroach on the way the game is played. In the latter third of the game, particularly, you find yourself eschewing the intended gameplay in order to beat the system and exploit its flaws to your advantage – finding sweetspots in boss arenas where you can't be harmed, for example, or utilising a poorly balanced weapon's powerful secondary function to negate the need to engage in tactical confrontation.

Ultimately such a catalogue (or perhaps that should be comedy) of errors eventually overrides any temptations a player may have felt to forgive and look upon *Geist* favourably – and serve only as a cruel reminder that perhaps, in the right hands, it could have been so much more. **[4]**



The imprecise aiming and a bare minimum of control options make headshots and confidently ducking in and out of cover play second fiddle to careering towards the enemy in an attempt to shower them with bullets



The bottom-left-hand side of the HUD is home to the character model of the host you're currently controlling. Distracting and unintentionally amusing, they mirror your movements with an almost shambolic lack of grace



***Geist* plays out through a wide variety of scenarios and environments. However, the way they are introduced and presented lacks subtlety, and differing environments crash up against each other with little explanation**

Through the eyes of your ghost form, *Geist* can be enchanting and despite your ever-decreasing health (requiring you to enter a host, or drain any nearby plantlife for energy to replenish it) is capable of filling the player with a distinct sense of power





The Pipotchi robot from *Ape Escape 2* makes a return, as do the ubiquitous raft and tank. As with the first sequel, the vehicles are more constrained to quick bursts through small areas as opposed to the first's exploratory runs



APE ESCAPE 3

FORMAT: PS2 PRICE: ¥5,800 (£30)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN) TBC (UK)
PUBLISHER: SCEI DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE

From the first moments of the maddeningly memorable and maddeningly repetitious theme, *Ape Escape 3* is as familiar as the day you first swung the net. Rather than risk redesigning a winning formula, Sony has instead chosen simply to refine it, remaining so true to its roots that it features no new gadgets beyond those of the original. The twist, however, is in the scenery. With the monkeys having invaded a global TV network facility and subdued the population (and the cast of the original) with 24-hour lowgrade programming, a new pair of sibling heroes are tasked with shutting down the operation by travelling from studio set to set, through a diverse range of disparate parodic settings, from hard-boiled shipyard thriller to a kung-fu comedy starring Ukkii Chen.

These locations set the scene, as it were, for the game's solitary new innovation: costumes. Certain obstacles throughout the game can be overcome using various unlockable outfits – only the Miracle Ninja, for instance, can cross gaps by running across a wire. The costumes can be worn only for short periods of time without steady refills from capsules dropped from defeated enemies or broken props and scenery, and unfortunately, while this mechanic does bring a new offensive emphasis to the game, it sits awkwardly atop the rest. Few costumes are needed beyond the level in which they're introduced, and aside from a few artificially induced situations, it's easy to forget they're there at all.

Where the costumes ultimately find their purpose is in their upgraded capturing capacity versus the conventional weaponry, as the apes are significantly more agile and resistant to capture than ever before. Where once a knock with the stun club would leave them open to an easy netting, now the same often flares their temper and sets off ferocious counter attacks, sometimes so fierce you drop your gadget, resulting in a panicked sprint to reclaim your weapon before the ape gets there first, as getting caught by your own net brings a sudden hasty trip back to home base.

By far the most slickly produced and gorgeously rendered version of the series, the pacing this time around is even more fluid than its predecessors – less an open-ended matter of hide and seek, and more focused on the stylish, dramatic pursuit and capture that its TV and silver-screen themes would seem to require. While this streamlined flow does mean that your initial playthrough will come to a quicker end than previous iterations, there's even more content than before for return trips to earlier levels. While you may have played it before, *Ape Escape 3* proves you can never have too much of a good thing. **[7]**



Miracle Ninja can reach new areas by use of these fortuitously placed wall-run panels. Of all of the costumes, the ninja is one of the few that the level designers saw fit to effectively repurpose through the rest of the game





In a twist on the standard moving platform so brilliantly simple it's a wonder no one's done it before, one of the most memorable levels here sees you miles high, bounding across the wings of successive airplanes



Scattered throughout the levels are movie cameras that you can trigger to capture the monkey actors in action, and these clips can be accessed and viewed later in a movie theatre. As the scenes progress, each becomes a more ridiculously pantomimed parody than the last

Monkey CQC



In a wise save-the-best-for-last decision, Mesal Gear Solid isn't made available until you've finished the main game itself, and almost instantly steals the show. Instructed by Codec calls from Snake himself, and armed with laser-sighted banana SOCOM, pineapple grenades, C4 watermelons, and wildly flailing CQC fists, you'll wend your way through reconfigured *Ape Escape* levels.

Like any good caricature, Mesal Gear strips and accentuates its subject to the barest essentials: getting from A to B undetected, and collecting dropped monkeytags from fallen guards. Borrowing wholesale the title screen, interface, music and idol posters of the original, it's gaming parody at its finest.



BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE

FORMAT: PS2, XBOX PRICE: £40
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 30 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: CAVIA PREVIOUSLY IN: E153

Fright club



Customisation in *Beat Down* covers plenty of ground – perhaps too much considering the limited selection of clothing, hairstyles, accessories and cosmetic surgery. Interestingly, there's no gender discrimination – men can take to the streets in a denim miniskirt and high heels just as easily as women can dress as builders, but the unisex catalogues only serve to heighten disappointment at their contents. Motivation for the game's camp cosplay comes in the form of a notoriety meter that reflects your chances of being accosted by police and mobsters, appearance alteration proving as essential for anonymity as the system itself feels pointless.

The most *Beat Down* was ever likely to provide was a successful result to a consistently failed experiment – a roadworthy vehicle for the resurrection of Capcom's hallowed scrolling brawlers. For what credit it's worth (and opinions are polarised) it thematically achieves this with the sharply textured Las Sombras – a city-wide swapshop of daftly attired loiterers who trade blows along with an omnipresent supply of weapons, never once questioning whether the English language offers words beyond almost random jibes and threats.

As ironically inoffensive, charming and often hilarious as it is, however, Cavia's game is worrying in its readiness to make mistakes. The thin end of the wedge involves niggles with clipping and repeatedly checking fallen enemies for items, but the troubles become exasperating even before the environment has a chance to tire. Considering how few distractions the city offers, this says plenty.

You'd have thought, first, that Capcom would have distanced itself from the ignominy of abundant, game-shattering load times after *Resident Evil: Outbreak*, but here they resurface between every minor location and activity. The rise through the ranks of *Beat Down*'s underworld is therefore a fractured experience, demanding so many retrodden steps that some may deem it an immediately desolate one as well.

In its regular, often fleeting brawls, the game's bevy of weapons, together with its limited throw-set and area special moves, certainly recognise the cherished formulae of *Final Fight* and *The Punisher*, but faults lie in almost every subsequent addition. *Beat Down* has twinned the dynamics of free-roaming and planar combat while demonstrating little understanding of how best to weave them together. An unsettling result is that the worthier the opponent, the more limiting the pattern of play becomes. Even with a character schooled in their full complement of unlockable moves, brawls do little to hide their simplicity, winning tactics often feeling more like exploits than skill.

Perhaps most annoying are the dead ends. Enter a protracted tournament or boss battle having neglected to purchase a supply of health top-ups (entirely possible thanks to the repetitive trek often required to obtain them) and you may find yourself trapped in an inescapable loop of the same fight, the only option upon death being to quit or retry.

The fact is this game does little justice to any of the design templates it employs (it may, in fact, simply have taken on too many). Its free-roaming adventure, character customisation, pride and reputation systems, levelling framework and AI-assisted fighting are universally shallow and often misguided. Yes, *Beat Down* revives the warped charisma of Capcom's beat 'em up heyday, but that's the only area where it actually triumphs. **[4]**





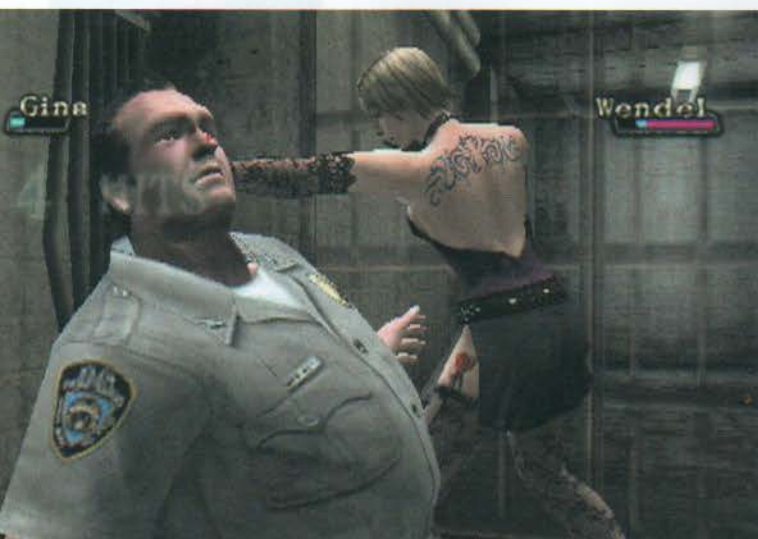
Wear an opponent's pride gauge down to zero and the throw button initiates an intimidation dialogue – less a tree of options than a stump, success being increasingly dependent on the state of your adversary's health



Weapon attacks can only be negated if another weapon is used to block, while grapples can steal a weapon from negligent hands. This dynamic, however, is as complex an example of the game's fighting engine as you'll encounter



Bars and clubs offer many of *Beat Down's* save and mission opportunities, also serving alcoholic beverages that restore health to differing degrees. Drink too much, however, and you'll experience a 'bad trip' – a slo-mo annoyance that, rather stupidly, makes fighting easier



Cavia hasn't shied from the opportunity to 'borrow' a few likenesses, as unflattering Michael Madsen lookalike Wendel illustrates during an early encounter in a prison





Nouhime, wife of a moustache-twirlingly villainous Oda Nobunaga, comes close to stealing the show with her wildly unsporting gunslinging talents. Her weakness is in a relatively low health and long vulnerable moments with her heavy attacks – if any enemy can survive the approach unscathed



Leaping astride a waiting horse showcases both the best and worst of *Basara*: it's breathlessly fast, to the extent that control or camera-framing can be an issue, and hugely entertaining in the resulting devastation, despite the fact that there's barely any skill or forward planning involved

SENGOKU BASARA

FORMAT: PS2 **PRICE:** ¥6,800 (£35)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN), TBA (UK) **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 **PREVIOUSLY IN:** E149



While hero partners will show slightly more initiative, your allied forces' contribution to the battle is chiefly just in showing up. You're scored on how many of your generals survive, but your inability to prevent them battering themselves against enemy heroes' Basara attacks makes it a question of luck

D*ynasty Warriors*' contribution to *Sengoku Basara* is obvious from the moment the opening movie kicks in, but it's not simply a case of donating practically all its gameplay mechanics. If Koei's creation is a videogame based on the Sengoku wars, *Basara* is a videogame based on that videogame, a theatrical display which conquers not by strategy, but with a smile. Character designer Makoto Tsuchibayashi gives the 16-strong historical cast a flamboyant treatment that wouldn't look out of place in his *Shinobi*, and the stellar line-up of Japanese voice-acting talent's recitals are so hyperbolic as to often hurdle the language barrier.

If the game's storytelling is intentionally Dynasty, never mind the Warriors, then the gameplay focuses entirely on the combat part of the equation – abandoning any pretension of strategy in favour of 20-minute-long running brawls. The battlefields are set dressing and your allied forces extras: the only deciding factor in each conflict is your human wrecking-ball of a character, and the occasional stages that deviate from this progression drag as a result. Interestingly, the few points where the game's difficulty spikes high enough to become actually taxing are just as wearying. *Basara*, it seems, is best enjoyed when uncomplicated by anything more than remembering to breathe between drumming out military tattoos of square-square-square-triangle.

In the thick of battle, the game is immensely swift – producing enough devastation to skip a frame or two becomes as much a victory as routing an enemy platoon – and the controls, if not the camera, are solidly responsive. The choice between characters is meaningful, contrasting stand-up brawlers and willowy skirmishers with a choice of focused strikes, vicious sweeping knockdowns or endlessly damaging juggles. A character can be equipped with two heavy attacks from their personal selection between battles, allowing some degree of customisation, and three item slots allow ability boosts – although the destructive momentum of the game is such that it might well be tempting to trade an attack or defence modifier for an indulgence like a lute that swaps the level's soundtrack for *Basara*'s pounding rock opera theme.

For a game designed to be an all-you-can-KO buffet, it's slightly disappointing that ten characters are locked at the game's opening, a ploy for longevity that would arguably be unnecessary if the whole roster was readily available. And the lack of mid-battle checkpoints can see a failed boss fight frustrate half an hour's play, another aspect in which the game's design fails to step out of the way of its own relentless charge.

But such is the charm and style heaped upon *Basara*'s elementary gameplay that it will take longer than might be expected for the experience to grow old. Those unmoved by that elementary gameplay, however, may find it never gets new. **[6]**







Troops routed after their general's defeat – or spooked by the steadily mounting heights of your kill counter – run shrieking before collapsing in an ungainly heap and moaning that they want to go home. Such laments are usually lost as they're swept up as collateral damage to a Basara attack

Western devils



With much of *Basara*'s melodrama tied to Sengoku history, Capcom has seen fit to reskin the western release with a grim fantasy universe as *Devil Kings*. It's a possibly unnecessary move given that the market has had no qualms over Koei's output, and *Basara*'s frequently hilarious cutscenes might do more to sell the period than the latter's po-faced generals squatting in their war rooms. *Devil Kings* may be a more intricate game – further skills and moves have been mooted, and difficulty will likely be increased – but it remains to be seen if that can make up for the excision of *Basara*'s charisma.



MUSHIHIMESAMA

FORMAT: PS2 PRICE: ¥6,800 (£35)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN), TBA (UK)
PUBLISHER: TAITO DEVELOPER: CAVE

Cave, the 2D shooter house, is both its chosen genre's strongest proponent and worst enemy, the increasing complexity of its wall of bullets shooters proving a wall against entry to all but the diehards. *Mushihimesama*'s arcade release marked a sea change for Cave's output, signifying that while it had survived on its cult following in the past, it was not content to fiddle with dip-switches while the arcades burned.

So gone are the military-industrial dystopias and flashes of gore, replaced with the luminous fantasy once characteristic of coin-op halls. In the game's default Original mode the bullet hell is gone too, though faster bullet speed and still-intricate flak blossoms ensure it's no flight through the park. If it's not easy, it is simple – accessibly, enticingly so, pared back to precise design with no complication beyond a cascading bonus for score pick-ups.

The step up from Original is Maniac mode, shifting *Mushi*'s dynamic into an all-(enemy)-guns-blazing Cave effort. Basic enemies fire more, whereas pattern-firing opponents gain at least one further level of volcanic, looping attack. The game's chaining system also appears, with uninterrupted hits on enemies providing a bonus to subsequent kills. As base scoring is low, maintaining a multi-figure chain bonus off hardier enemies is required to wring the highest scores from each level – and opportunities are regularly provided in clouds of intentional slowdown.

A final Ultra mode – concealed behind a button code in the arcade version – feels almost like the developer engaging in a game of chicken with its fanbase, a question of who will flinch first and call its staggering intensity oppressive rather than challenging. Shooter veterans may consider Ultra the definitive mode and Original a bastardisation; conversely, newcomers caught by Original's hook may never be good enough to survive Ultra, other than with near-constant bombing and continues.

It's a more overt approach to accommodating difficulty and play style than Cave's previous *Espgaluda* attempted with an adaptable speed-changing mechanic, yet *Mushi* is slightly less useful for it. Though Original mode teaches level layouts, it doesn't necessarily suggest the best chaining routes for the dedicated modes, or more importantly the temperance to steer through their all-encompassing bullet vectors. The scoring system itself, though rewarding, is again less tactile than *Espgaluda*'s, with high-level technique an obscure method of staggering fire rates that seems unlikely to appeal outside of the shooter community.

But *Mushi*'s value is not simply in its attempt to bridge an audience demanding more challenge with a would-be audience looking for less of it. It's also beautiful, exhilarating proof that the genre is worth fighting for – even if Cave hasn't quite cracked its rehabilitation. **[7]**

Automatic for the beetle



An in-house port rather than a collaboration with previous console partner Arika, *Mushi* is marginally less polished than Arika's efforts, most notably in the eventually frustrating load time between frontend and game. Cave's attention to detail is elsewhere, such as providing 20 different frequency settings for rapid- and autofire: this is due to the contentious issue of autofire useage in hi-score play, as the nature of the chaining system awards more points for more hits. Home version challengers can now experiment without resorting to cracking open their local cabinet – or simply play without autofire, as Japanese coin-op bible Arcadia maintains separate listings for auto-assisted and normal *Mushi* play.



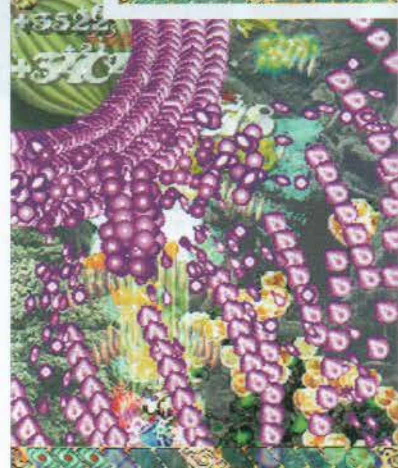
Though scarab-riding heroine Reko is barely larger than her pinpoint hitbox in-game, her illustrated form (an extensive gallery features) groomed her to be Cave's biggest marketing icon to date, spawning a mobile phone title, a puzzle game, and a disturbingly salacious figurine



Continuing a great shooter tradition of the-boss-is-the-level third stages, *Mushi*'s sprite-pushing power is flexed with the undulating joints of a monstrous bug. Even after having its carapace blasted apart at length, it has the audacity to produce a core that puts up a standard boss fight







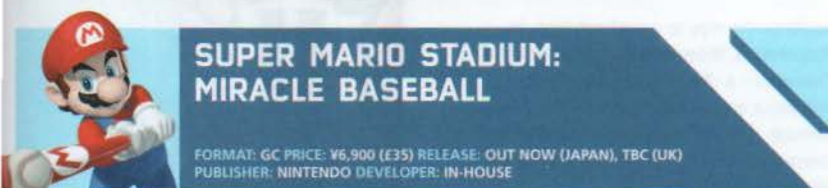
Ultra mode's hypnotic starfield of bullets is, at least in theory, less absurdly difficult than it may appear, as only the central point of a bullet is lethal, and only the central point of your character sprite is vulnerable. Survival, then, is simply a matter of threading through the eyes of half a dozen moving needles every second



The debut title for Cave's shift to the new arcade hardware, *Mushi* is visually sharper and slicker than previous games. This is shown off to great effect in the port's widescreen Tate mode, if less so with the forced vertical letterboxing of its standard mode



The stops on *Baseball's* brief tour of Mario World include Bowser's Castle (above) and Kongo Jungle, the more characterised stages dotted with various environmental traps and obstacles that add spice by skewing the ball's trajectory



SUPER MARIO STADIUM: MIRACLE BASEBALL

FORMAT: GC PRICE: ¥6,900 (£35) RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN), TBC (UK)
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE







It's good to see more advanced concepts such as fatigue playing their part in more eventful games, pitchers visibly flagging as a cue for the player to usher in a replacement. The team management screen is simple and effective, the prevalent Japanese text presenting only minor issues

Irrespective of its faltering strength, the Mario brand remains the fruitiest flavour to sprinkle over sport's plainest concoctions. At its best, it stands as a seal of creativity in a genre often paled by gaming's modern obsession with believability. At its worst, it at least manages to restore some percussion to those essential beats such as shooting on goal, serving an ace or, indeed, striking a baseball clear across the ramparts of Bowser's Castle. *Miracle Baseball* – the opening event in Nintendo's fresh Mario sporting calendar – benefits from having few bases to cover in its grasping of arcade baseball's near-forgotten charm. With the possible exception of the *MLB Slugfest* games, the last great examples were *Baseball Stars* and *Super Baseball 2020* – Neo-Geo games released a decade and a half ago.

Recently, Nintendo's knee-jerk reaction when confronted with such a task has been to take the sport concerned on a tour of its usual haunts, break out the special moves and set its balls on fire. The approach is no different here, but the dynamic is evidently more appropriate. *Miracle Baseball's* control system neatly complies with the design philosophy of the GameCube controller itself, the A button singled out as the primary response to any given situation, its various modifiers arranged sensibly around it and few distractions existing beyond. Pitches can be variably powered and angled with ease, while key manoeuvres such as stealing bases and bunting are equally achievable. This isn't to say that the game is an oversimplification – it simply exploits the single-mindedness inherent in the acts of batting, pitching and fielding. And that's the prime and inevitable reason why, at a basic level, you'll either warm to this game or freeze.

Beyond the stop-start flow of events and the rhythmic swing between apparent randomness (the precise direction in which you send the ball) and discouraging inevitability (most ball trajectories ending with a fielder's glove), the game's other concerns are its content and, disappointingly, its character. Neither Mario nor his entourage feel alive here because their presence amounts to little more than a cycle of triggered animations and hollers – this is less a cast of returning friends, it seems, than a slideshow of quietening memories. With its superficial minigames, locations and challenges, *Baseball* feels like a licence in need of outside assistance, and it's undeniable that a Super *Nintendo* Stadium would have comparatively thrived thanks to its wider range of IPs and ideas. The game's core singleplayer mode, Challenge, pretties up its meagre assets as rewards for the persevering player, but the toybox feels shallow, even if it's not entirely empty.

Multiplayer, ultimately, is where *Miracle Baseball* shines – not thanks to the crude party game it coughs up as an additional feature, but because the game of baseball needs little more than an accessible interface and sensible controls to succeed in that context. Mario can still throw a mean pitch and has a solid swing, but it's his lazy ambition that catches him out. **[6]**



Toy Box represents the most dramatic surgery Nintendo has performed on baseball's basic formula. If it wasn't such a transparent attempt to hammer down the *Mario Party* mindset, perhaps it would be more enjoyable



Unlike the GameCube spin on *Mario Tennis*, *Baseball* makes judicious use of its special moves, limiting them both in number and in scope and never dropping a 'smart bomb' that will win out by default

Bases reloaded



The outline of Nintendo's minigame template may show through the thin skin of *Miracle Baseball* a little too clearly, but at least it marks the company's continuing desire to flesh out potentially skeletal designs. Still, there's no denying that these particular examples are routinely more idle than they are distractions, making no effort to rework the game's engine to better facilitate their goals. It says much that, of all the bonus games *Baseball* provides, the most enjoyable is that in which you bat a variety of randomly fired Bob-ombs into the sky before they explode into an increasingly radiant pattern of fireworks. While the score for a successful hit can be increased if repeatedly obtained, it's telling that the game's control system offers little variation in the altitude a struck ball can achieve.



OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN!

FORMAT: DS PRICE: ¥4,800
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN), TBA (UK)
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: INIS

There's nothing in life that transcends the language barrier quite like diarrhoea – that awful clutching in your gut when you realise the one thing you want not to happen is about to. Everyone has felt it, everyone knows to dread it. That *Ouendan*, despite its aggressive manga stylings, chooses to base its stories on predicaments which generate such universal empathy means that it strikes a chord – literally – with everyone who plays it.

A rhythm-action game devised by the studio behind the masterful *Gitaroo Man*, *Ouendan* puts you at two removes from the action. Set in a bustling city, the inhabitants gradually succumb to despair and frustration in the face of day-to-day nightmares – a young boy tries to get his homework done despite the distractions of his family, a shy secretary tries to catch her handsome boss's eye while fighting through mountains of work, and, yes, a violinist gets caught by a case of the squits on his way to a performance. In desperation, these people call out for the Ouendan – a cheerleading squad who will shout encouragement and fuel them through their difficulties. But the Ouenden themselves need cheering on, and that's where you come in.

A cross between a timed join-the-dots and tapping your fingers to your favourite song, *Ouendan* asks you to beat out an accompaniment to a range of indecently cheery J-rock hits, following and counterpointing the song's rhythm with the musical sensitivity that made *Gitaroo* such a satisfying experience. Successfully complete each section and the person you're encouraging will clear another hurdle on the way to their goal. Survive to the end, and they'll triumph. And sharing their triumph is one of the sweetest sensations in gaming, not least thanks to the artistry and pacing of the accompanying animations.

As ever, it's the immediacy of the touchscreen that is *Ouendan*'s strength, giving you instantaneous input into the music, and rewarding skilled play with crisp precision. The 14 songs evolve over the four difficulty settings, rather than simply doubling the number of notes each time. Each level picks out a different aspect of the track, developing from four-square beat-thumping for beginners, to triplet flourishes and awkward off-beats for the pros. But if the game is another gold star in the DS's crown, it also serves to highlight one of its worst weaknesses – the awful tinniness of the speakers. Headphones are essential to do the soundtrack justice.

Overall, *Ouendan* is a beautifully accomplished piece of software: confident, imaginative, demanding; and it's another crucial example of how games don't need elaborate realism to be immersive, or have thousands of lines of dialogue to pack an emotional punch. After all, if diarrhoea is the most dreaded of universal languages, music is the best loved. **[8]**

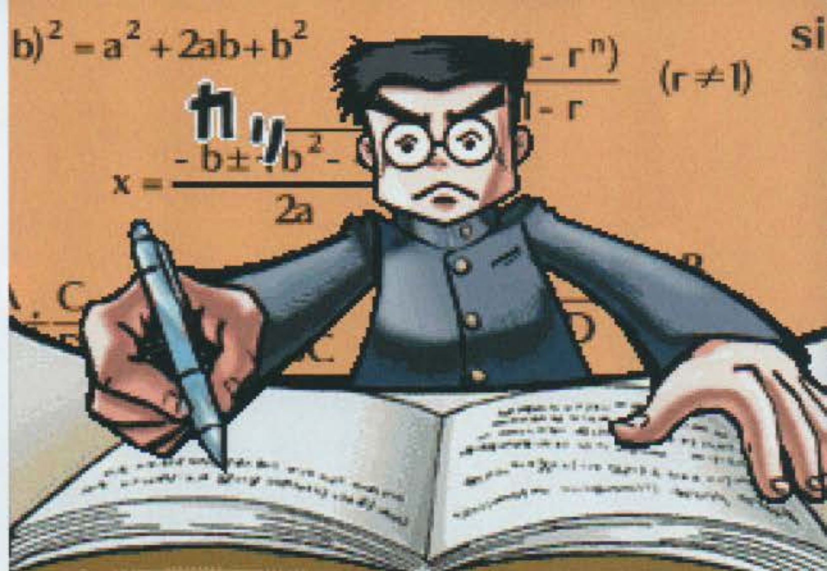
Jumping the shark



Gitaroo Man was famous for two things – the delicate sweetness of the Legendary Song and the crushing challenge of the shark level – a difficulty spike which ended many players' progress through the game after only three songs. *Ouendan*'s difficulty curve is much more smoothly modulated, but the game can still be frustrating. Your health is continually depleting, and can only be topped up by hitting perfect notes. Consequently, while dropping the occasional beat can easily be rectified, missing an entire sequence – easily done on the faster, harder levels – is an instant game over.



As well as tapping out the rhythm, the game asks you to trace shapes reminiscent of *Gitaroo Man*'s line-following sections, and to vigorously spin a disc for bonus points with which to raise your overall rank



While you play – and your attention is fixed on the lower screen – the story unfolds at the top. At the end of each song section is a short interlude which lets you watch the action, and there's a replay option which lets you see the whole thing



The Ouendan may be a sinister-looking bunch, but they're clearly well-intentioned. Unlocking harder difficulties makes different-looking cheerleading teams available



Each song is prefaced with a skippable manga that sets up the predicament of each character. These may start simply, but they soon become fantastical and epic



NANOSTRAY

FORMAT: DS PRICE: $30 (£18) RELEASE: OUT NOW (US), TBA (UK)
PUBLISHER: MAJESCO DEVELOPER: SHIN'EN

First impressions of *Nanostray* are painful. Seemingly specifically designed to remind you just how unwieldy the DS is when used as a traditional handheld, the button layout means you'll be inclined to play with both L and R triggers held continuously. Cramp, frustration and peculiar indentations in the heels of your hand soon follow. The use of the twin screens is also poorly judged: *Nanostray* is a fast-paced shoot 'em up of the kind which requires you to sink your full attention into the top screen, where the action is displayed. Instead, you'll need to keep flicking glances down at the lower screen in order to check crucial status details and stab an awkward thumb at the weapon-change buttons. It's exactly the kind of fudge people feared when the DS was announced.

Persevere, however, and there are some subtleties. *Nanostray* is a game about restraint, rewarding you for every frame of the game in which you don't have those triggers pressed, and for every special attack and smartbomb that goes unused. This adds some tension and tactical charge into something which would otherwise suffer for the blandness of its enemy and bullet patterns. Although there is a choice of four weapons, each with a different secondary attack and each suited to different situations (a fairly pedestrian mix of homing, side-shot, lock-on and straight-ahead), and despite the attempts to put some depth into the 3D field of play, there are few memorable moments.



The buttons on the bottom screen allow you to change weapon type on the fly, but while the radar screen is designed to let you keep out of trouble while you flick your eyes down, you're more likely to settle on one weapon throughout

But if there isn't a great deal of sophistication, there also isn't much in the way of mucking around. Flying up the screen making things go pop has been reliably entertaining for decades. The settings are vibrant and the checks and balances of the scoring system are enough to keep the brain as well as the trigger finger engaged. And, although the DS has a growing menu of delicious curios – see last month's *Caduceus* or this month's *Ouendan* (p94) – there's no harm in having the option of some meat-and-potatoes gaming now and again. **[5]**

Although the bosses have an impressive sense of scale, their attack patterns don't have the flair and imagination of classics of the genre. However, defeating them without special attacks is still a challenge





SIGMA STAR SAGA

FORMAT: GBA PRICE: $30 (£17)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (US) PUBLISHER: NAMCO
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD





It's been well over 15 years since Irem and Compile conspired to spawn the shooter/RPG genre with 8bit cult hit *The Guardian Legend*, and to date no one has successfully recreated its marriage of the two disparate styles. With *Sigma Star Saga*, this was clearly WayForward's intention – both to pay homage and give a 32bit facelift to a genre that's never been given its due.

To tackle the unconventional blend of shooting and land-based exploration, the game implements an admittedly novel plot device: as you explore each planet, an orbiting patrol of living biological spacecraft can instantly whisk you into their pilot seat when threatened, allowing you to eliminate the danger and return to your work. These dynamically generated endless side-scrolling levels can be as simple as an open range 20-kill blast, a pattern-based boss fight or a claustrophobic squeeze through twisted tunnels, and in general are varied enough to never feel excessively repetitive. The ships you pilot are also randomly selected, meaning you'll be behind the wheel of an unwieldy battleship one fight, and a sleek and manoeuverable scout the next.



Throughout the course of your adventure you'll return to the same planets and reach new areas with the aid of new weapon and item upgrades, but the joy of exploration is sapped by the limited number of steps you'll go forward before being swept away once again



By design, the randomly generated levels never reach the proper level of intensity common to the genre, and weapon options, despite allowing for several hundred combinations of unlockable configurations, ultimately have little impact

Just how well this construct succeeds depends largely on your tolerance for the age-old RPG random battle system. With the game's over-reliance on constant meandering backtracking and aimless overworld item hunts, another shooting segment is never more than ten seconds away, resulting in a jarring, disjointed flow that can be at best somewhat disorienting upon your return, and at worst fully annoying, especially when suddenly pulled into the longest level just one step away from your goal.

In *Sigma*'s case, the design has the additional misfortune of trivialising overworld battles. Defeating enemies on land contributes nothing more than the rare smartbomb or health pack – both of which are also provided by destructible landmarks liberally scattered around the planet – making overworld monsters little more than unwelcome obstacles more easily avoided than reckoned with, especially when desperately sprinting to the next area before another random battle.

These structural shortcomings are most unfortunate in that they mar a surprisingly sophisticated storyline of interplanetary double-agent intrigue, showcased with WayForward's by now signature character designs and oversized, superbly animated sprites. However, in the end *Sigma Star Saga* does justice to neither of its two loosely conjoined games. **[5]**



VIRTUA TENNIS WORLD TOUR

FORMAT: PSP PRICE: $40 (£23) RELEASE: OCTOBER 4 (US), TBC (UK)
PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: SUMO DIGITAL

Barring a fleeting visual glitch here and a physics hiccup there, there's no question that *World Tour* is another convincing flex of PSP muscle. A near-perfect rendition of the PS2's *Virtua Tennis 2* port, its summery Sega-vision hues are a sight to behold in pristine 16:9. True, the shadows that fan out from beneath the ball during spotlit matches look patently wrong and racquet sounds are still characteristically odd, but the very fact that Sumo has invited such comparisons with the worlds of both current-gen consoles and reality itself speaks volumes.

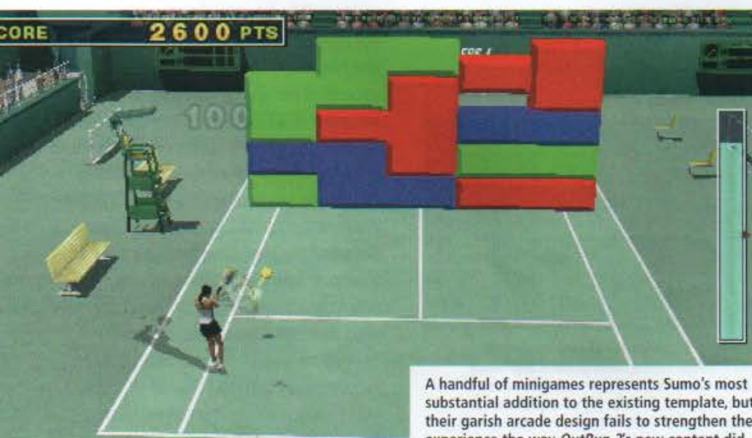
To those hands trained in the accurate analogue manoeuvring of both *Virtua Tennis*' home versions and PAM's *Top Spin*, however, the precision lost by the PSP's nub is notable. Serving particularly elicits the sense that, for all the deftness you can still acquire through repeat play, a certain degree of consistency now exists beyond the scope of the hardware. On a similar note, the increasingly irksome limits that Sony is placing on developers' use of the UMD drive have again reared their ugly head, albeit in the forgivable guise of momentary frontend stutters and the odd protracted load.

Technical quibbles aside, PSP has ultimately given Sumo a genuine opportunity to broaden the horizons of *Virtua Tennis*, and there's a debate to be had regarding how much gamers should expect the developer to seize that opportunity. Should the pleasure of seeing a home console made prematurely portable be tempered with the recognition that PSP is still a mobile platform, or should we be no less demanding of its own arcade conversions? Regardless, there are familiar issues in *World Tour*'s career mode that make for a disappointing encounter. The forced adoption and development of two characters, the excessive flogging of some rather tired minigames and the complete lack of instilled drama in your ascent through the rankings continue to propagate the feeling that this is an extended coin-op rather than an expanded experience. Though its stellar looks and innately satisfying play (especially in multiplayer) continue to serve aces, *World Tour*'s rallying skills leave something to be desired. **[7]**





The new player roster is a welcome update, although the lack of fictitious characters to support the main line-up means that career tournaments still lack a sense of dramatic progression, real-life stars thrown in randomly with little regard for their comparative standings



A handful of minigames represents Sumo's most substantial addition to the existing template, but their garish arcade design fails to strengthen the experience the way *OutRun 2*'s new content did



MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION

FORMAT: PSP PRICE: £35 RELEASE: OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: SCEE DEVELOPER: SONY CAMBRIDGE



A selection of weapons can be collected throughout the game, although the absence of a lock-on means targeting is imprecise and missile weapons become clumsy to the point of uselessness

The rather convoluted hype generator for *Resurrection* goes as follows: *MediEvil* is the most successful PS1 franchise not to be updated to PS2. Instead it makes its comeback on the PSP, skipping an entire generation but failing to display an equivalent evolutionary leap. While updating a series requires a certain loyalty to its original style, it also needs to have moved with the times.

Maybe it's unfair to criticise a game for dredging up all the familiar platforming tropes, but the level design and combat mechanic also show a stultifying lack of imagination. At its heart *MediEvil Resurrection* is a thirdperson combat game with some platforming elements thrown in. So you'd think most of the effort would be expended in this area, ensuring the combat remained tight, responsive and fair. Sadly, it is not. Battles descend into wild, random meleé attacks, characters lurching drunkenly around each other and displaying little sophistication in terms of AI or tactical nuance. All combat encounters are a boring free-for-all, with the exception of boss battles – which follow the 'find weakness, circle, hit, repeat' tradition – some of them going on for an age.

On a positive note, *MediEvil Resurrection* is visually resplendent and technically sound with levels offering a variety of backdrops and moods. The puzzles are not the most inspiring, but using tools collected along the way to dig tunnels or burn down haystacks at least engages the brain and provokes a greater awareness of the environments. But this is lukewarm praise for a game that is incapable of delivering anything fresh.

Ultimately, it's easy to be left with the feeling that perhaps the *MediEvil* franchise hadn't been updated for good reason. For anyone who hasn't played a thirdperson platforming adventure game in the last five years, this might well serve as perfectly engaging and adequate entertainment. To everyone else, it serves as a very clear reference point for just how many evolutions and innovations the rest of the genre has undergone since the PS1's heyday. **[5]**





Apart from during the boss battles, *MediEvil Resurrection* can be saved at any point, but this is something that clearly encouraged the developer to drop in a few groan-inducing instant-death scenarios. The clutch of minigames adds more to the package, but they're all simplistic shooting and whack-a-mole variants



MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3

FORMAT: PC, XBOX (VERSION TESTED) PRICE: £40
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 2 PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: CLIMAX





The bikes available in Extreme Mode can be upgraded; the most powerful models will need to be unlocked, however, along with myriad racers and reverse/mirror tracks. The extra details extend as far as visualisation software for custom tunes, but *MotoGP*'s traditionally funky credits sequence seems absent, sadly

Motorbikes, like ATVs, have greater worth as videogames than simply being magnets for sports fans. ATV games have racing lines that are three dimensional – with airborne trajectories that matter as much as steering – and motorbikes have a rider's weight to lean and tilt as they sway in and out of corners. This is why the Xbox *MotoGP* series has been so lauded, a series that utilises every analogue trigger and stick to convey a racing experience that's about more than just clipping the apex.

MotoGP 3 continues this fine tradition, remaining as smooth and exhilarating a ride as it ever was, and is accessible thanks as much to the easiness of its lowest difficulty as to its sensible use of the joypad. A major addition prevents the onset of staleness that threatens to come from racing around its typical selection of Grand Prix tracks: Extreme Mode. These urban and suburban environments offer courses with the kind of personality not found on the professional circuit, providing some entertaining variation in their bends, dips and undulations. The detail on display isn't magnificent, but the draw distance is deep and the change of scenery between races is more than welcome.

Outside of these new settings, the game's core doesn't feel like a massive departure from past *MotoGP*s, but it's still thrillingly fast and offers corner prompts that provide a useful guide regarding the speeds required to take them, if not the actual line itself. The option to customise paintjobs and leathers, to a surprising extent, is distracting but doesn't provide the satisfaction, freedom or the sheer visibility of *Forza*, where cars become sketch pads for overt or accomplished design. Still, *MotoGP 3* remains a strong, solid outing for those who enjoy a thoroughly analogue play experience as well as fans of motorbike racing. **[7]**



MotoGP 3's Live functionality is a forerunner for the kind of integration Xbox 360 is aiming for: the career mode can be played either online or off, and setting up a singleplayer race while connected results in the game searching for human opponents offering a similar challenge



THE CHIKYUU BOUEIGUN 2

FORMAT: PS2 PRICE: ¥2,100 (£10)
RELEASE: OUT NOW (JAPAN) PUBLISHER: D3
DEVELOPER: SANDLOT PREVIOUSLY IN: E146

Pretend *Invasion Day* never happened – *The Chikyuu Boueigun 2* (the series is known as *Earth Defense Force* in the west) is the perfect 21st century retelling of *Space Invaders*, and is best understood as the sum of the moments it captures, right from the very first: picking a 50-foot ant off the face of Big Ben, watching it plummet lamely into the Thames, then turning and shattering the London Eye with a single well-placed rocket.

It's the mortal dread of a trio of towering automatons slowly making their way through the streets, knowing that their only directive is your death. It's the sudden blue glow that gathers around their cannons when you realise you've been spotted and have seconds to avoid the onslaught of laser fire. It's the molasses-slow burning parabola of the plasma grenade you lob at the very last second before fleeing.

It's the hair-raising primal fight-or-flight response when you turn just in time to notice a fast-approaching swarm of mammoth spiders as they recklessly bound around suburban Tokyo, the satisfaction of the wet purple mist that sprays from each one as you tear through them with your plasma shotgun, and the spectacle of a crumpled, twitching carcass rolling through the air as you catch it mid-leap. It's the gut-wrenching feeling as you realise you've given it everything you've got and it just wasn't enough, and the simultaneous jamming down of the firing mechanism on your jetpack and the red alert sounding from your spent and overheating energy cells. And then it's the regret at that last futile shot as the first of the cable-thick silk threads forcefully wraps itself around you.

It's watching waves of winged ants streaming out of a skyscraper-high nest, and wishing you'd picked a weapon with a longer range as they all hum down toward you at once. It's finding yourself inside the many-tiered hive itself and wending your way upward taking out level after level of inhabitants. It's the cinematic, slow-motion, deep-focused money shot of dropping your first alien mothership, and the resultant fiery crash.

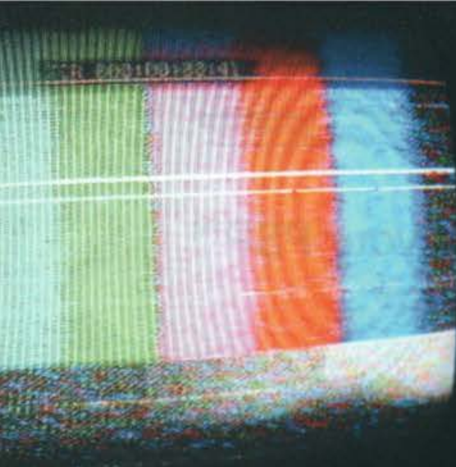
The label says Simple 2000, but call it confident economy. Sandlot has captured more adrenaline, more vibrance and more impact with a half-page design document and an unoptimised, repurposed in-house engine than so many multimillion-dollar developers have before. Like the B-movies that inspired it, this is an instant cult classic. **[8]**



As well as being nearly three times the size of the original, and maintaining the coop and deathmatch of the first, the sequel introduces night levels and a new female lead

Though it creaks and groans under the pressure of too much onscreen action, Sandlot's in-house engine is capable of some truly gorgeous exterior lighting effects and depth-of-field tricks, and the integrity of its sense of scale is near unmatched

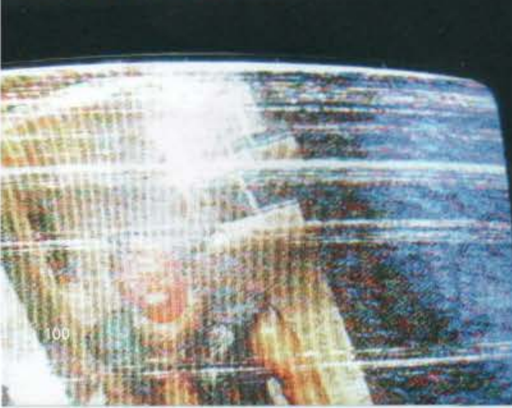





PlayStation.2
MANHUNT







TIME EXTEND

MANHUNT

FORMAT: **PC, PS2, XBOX**
PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR NORTH**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE DATE: **2003**

Gratuitous, morally repugnant, the nastiest videogame ever? Probably. But Rockstar's most troublesome offspring still remains a misunderstood and maligned masterpiece

Manhunt is one of the worst games in recent memory. It is also one of the best. It divided consumers and critics alike, garnering effusive praise from some and vituperative condemnation from others. While its dark, uncomfortable and morally dubious content was ripe for tabloid hysteria, less understandable was criticism that it was badly designed or intellectually retarded. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Think of other videogame nasties and the usual suspects shuffle under the spotlight: *Carmageddon, Doom, Resident Evil*. Each celebrated violence with gusto, but what made *Manhunt* particularly repellent to moral arbiters was its dark premise and its playful, knowing manipulation of genre tropes. No-brainer shooters like the gruesome *Soldier Of Fortune* can be easily dismissed as sick and shallow, but a game that constantly provokes questions about the nature of violence is a much more uncomfortable proposition.

Manhunt is magnetic in the rawest sense, repelling and fascinating in equal measure. Unlike other games where violence for violence's sake soon turns to apathy, the true horror of *Manhunt* is that the violence never gets stale. Ostensibly, you're performing the same grisly acts over and over again – but the squeamish thrill of slicing through a hunter's head with a wire or listening to the distinctive sound of a skull being cracked open with a meat clever as the brain slops out on to the ground never abates. The repetition becomes the opposite of gratuitous, forcing you to face your enjoyment of the horror time and time again.

Nor can you distance yourself from your actions by remaining aloof. One of Rockstar North's greatest achievements is making the player empathise with the game's anti-hero – and empathising with a character like Cash is, to say the least, problematic. The brilliant snuff premise is supported by a number of devices that make you identify with Cash's plight. Most profound is the earpiece that director Starkweather forces Cash to use during the opening cutscene. Replicated by your own headset, the link between you and the hero becomes tangible and personal. When Starkweather encourages Cash to up the kill rate or reprimands him for stalling it brings the violence into the personal domain. Your ability to bait hunters by shouting curses into the microphone wedges you into Cash's shoes even more firmly.

One of Rockstar North's achievements is making the player empathise with the game's anti-hero – and empathising with a character like Cash is, to say the least, problematic

Where other games set up an interesting backstory, only to abandon it once the action cranks up, *Manhunt* exploits its snuff premise with a Kubrickian level of doggedness and detail, driving both



HACK-MAN

Ungenerous observers have pointed out that *Metal Gear Solid* is nothing more than glorified *Pac-Man*, players constantly referring to dots on a radar as the surest way to navigate the world. Although the notion of Cash using such a sophisticated aid while on the run is ridiculous, its implementation is superb. Not only does the scanner display the alert status of enemies but it's also a simple matter to tell if they're on the same floor as you or are circling towards you up stairs. A shadow icon also proves a godsend, with blue indicating a hidden status and flashing that you're conspicuous. Such surety is a boon in a game that demands careful planning and a lot of creeping around. This level of detail also extends to the stealth executions, with Cash's animation altering to a more hunched, defensive posture when an execution can be administered. In this way, *Manhunt* is subtle and deadly.



Cash loses sympathy as a wronged hero when the narrative takes him on a rampage of revenge, ending up in Starkweather's office with a chainsaw. SWAT officers and beat cops must be clinically dispatched

you and Cash through a gauntlet of trials right up to the bloody denouement. Crackling CCTV footage, continual harassment from the movie's director and cutscenes in which the hero is unceremoniously dumped from one location to the next by paid goons constantly emphasise the warped gameshow narrative.

Moreover, *Manhunt* is perhaps videogaming's most sophisticated text about the nature of control, manipulation and power. You're constantly made aware of Starkweather's status as puppet-master, pulling the strings as part of some grand, gruesome design. Yet as players it's a weak excuse to claim we're merely caught up in the same power struggle – though we're propelled by the overarching plot, choice is everywhere. Whether intentional or not, *Manhunt* problematises the nature of videogame interaction, inviting players to question why they find the violence so intoxicating – the blood is as much on our hands as it is on the protagonist's. To say Cash is merely playing the part of a mindless brute won't wash either. When the tables turn midway through the game and you're asked to steal evidence from a journalist's apartment it's troubling to realise that only ordinary cops stand in your way. The switch between Cash as victim and spiteful revenger is stark, and few games highlight the player's lack of moral control so profoundly.

This identification with Cash and *Manhunt*'s uncomfortable meta-narrative is surely the primary reason why many have come away from the game feeling discomfited and psychologically jarred, when other, more bloody games leave them untroubled. One of the hallmarks of art is that it lets the basest human acts be explored with no moral reprisals, and in recent years videogames have taken over from movies as society's entertainment bogeyman. Can we really act out our darkest fantasies in games without facing inherent consequences or incurring long-term damage? Ironically, the hysteria that greeted the game's release acted only to stifle this crucial debate.

But to judge *Manhunt* only by its ability to shock and awe would be doing it a disservice – as an example of a finely judged stealth experience it has few peers. Yet it's here where controversy bites again. Many couldn't get enough of the tense stalking interspersed with superviolence, and few games leave such a sense of bereavement when the final credits roll. But it would be wrong not to point out that some people found the control scheme clumsy, the toe-to-toe combat irritating and the ambushes repetitive in nature.

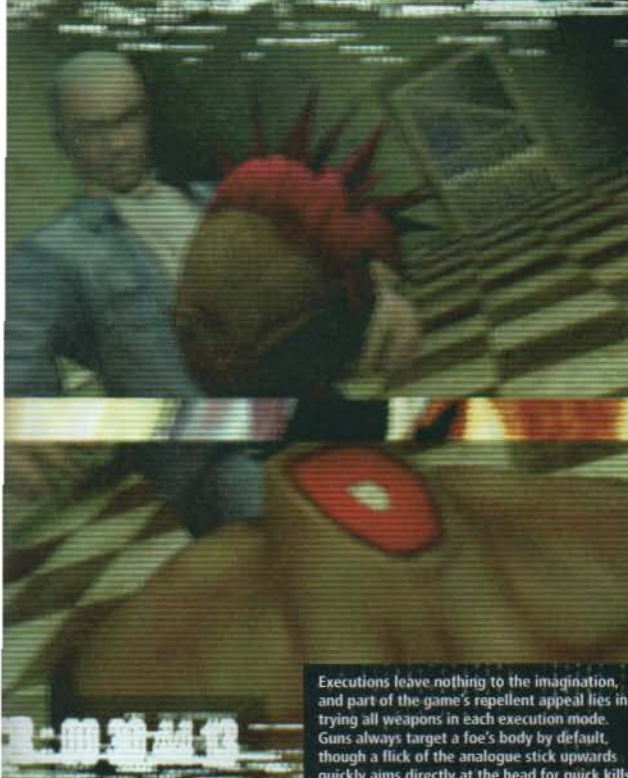
But despite these gripes, and within the framework of a game that rewards stealth above all, *Manhunt* proves to be a wholly reliable and dependable beast. The fusion between intelligent level design and consistent AI has rarely been so complete. The perennial problem that stealth games have in communicating to players how conspicuous they are is dissolved by introducing a number of

Many couldn't get enough of the tense stalking interspersed with super violence, and few games leave such a sense of bereavement when the final credits roll





Face-to-face combat remains a problem with an ineffective block resulting in hit-and-hope tactics (top). Shotguns come in two kinds, with light and without. The former allows you to see the visceral consequences of a blast but also alerts enemies to your location







Executions leave nothing to the imagination, and part of the game's repellent appeal lies in trying all weapons in each execution mode. Guns always target a foe's body by default, though a flick of the analogue stick upwards quickly aims directly at the head for quick kills

clear symbols which remove this stealth-doubt and allow players to enjoy and explore the environments without ever having to ask the question: 'Why did that happen?'

Nevertheless, the game doesn't truly get going until the open spaces and early gunplay of the zoo level. And arguably it doesn't hit confident, imperious stride until Cash turns the tables on his captor and sets out for revenge in the last quarter. That *Manhunt* saves the best till last is not a sin, but it does show up how monotone most games are: few were prepared for an experience that was willing to metamorphose so entirely as it went along. If the game's opening is intimidating, desperate and clumsy, its guns are deadly, thrilling and empowering.

Manhunt's greatest achievement is a consequence of this potency: it moves effortlessly from stealth to action with neither seeming like a poor relation. One moment you're picking off enemies with grace and precision, the next you're holed up in an outhouse with angry foes approaching and only five bullets left in your magazine. These Butch and Sundance moments are among the best in the game. Watching as red arrows flash angrily on your radar, then circle ever closer to your position can be unbearably tense.

Inhabiting *Manhunt*'s world may not always be comfortable, but a videogame has rarely had a better sense of place than Carcer City. This vision of some dystopian future where the masses are fed entertainment in the form of bloodsports recalls Rollerball and The Running Man. Other borrowings can be heard in the synthesised, nerve-jangling sound design that brings to mind John Carpenter's Assault On Precinct 13. The tributes are clever, moody and never lazy. Each hunter group adopts clan colours and gang traits that prefigure their sister studio's current project, *The Warriors* (see page 35).

The monumental design aesthetic cuts through the entire game, making the darkness, misery and claustrophobia inescapable. But there's beauty in Carcer City's squalor, a beauty borne out of the foreground detail etched into delicate landscape washes. From IR goggles gleaming out of subterranean lairs to the moonlight filtering through the night sky in the cemetery, *Manhunt* consistently elevates grime to the sublime. The art design further reinforces the snuff movie premise, CCTV footage tracking your every move with a fuzzy authenticity, even loading screens bearing a VHS tape motif. It steeps the game in a wonderfully macabre atmosphere, deepening your involvement tenfold.

***Manhunt* is anything** but comfortable, but its capacity to simultaneously shock and entertain is its defining characteristic. Like some modern-day Grand Guignol, it delights the darker parts of the human psyche and satiates a desire to explore the extremes of bad taste in theatre if not in reality. Still, at a time when movie conversions of videogames are on the increase it's hard to imagine *Manhunt* getting the green light from any film exec. Its subject matter is too problematic, its handling requiring a deft touch few would relish.

And that's the essence of *Manhunt*, a game of polar opposites – one that repels and attracts, one that provokes condemnation and praise in equal measure. And just when you're beginning to come to terms with the experience of simulated murder, the central tension looms again: why does the blood make it more thrilling? Why do I always perform the most graphic execution? Why am I enjoying it so much?



The enemies in *Manhunt* represent a perfect example of dumb intelligence – they're just bright enough to con you into believing them to be human while still being stupid enough to let you outwit them. The introduction of an execution 'meter' is a grisly reminder that you are in control and take responsibility for the virtual murder



THIS LITTLE PIGGY

Refreshingly, *Manhunt* has no bosses and is much the better for it. While developers often struggle to adapt control schemes and camera views for boss encounters (usually to vainly add spectacle to what's otherwise an uninteresting experience), Rockstar took a more imaginative route, varying pace and scenario goals rather than adding a larger character with a longer health bar. Having to save family members from torture or battering hunters with a fridge attached to a giant magnet are just two of the ways the player is engaged through unusual mechanics. The exception of course is Pigsy, a hideous psychopath with a chainsaw. As a denouement it's beautifully orchestrated and shreds already-fragile nerves to pieces. Once your porcine nemesis has been dispatched, all that's left to do is use his weapon to exact revenge on Starkweather in a final, bloody showdown.

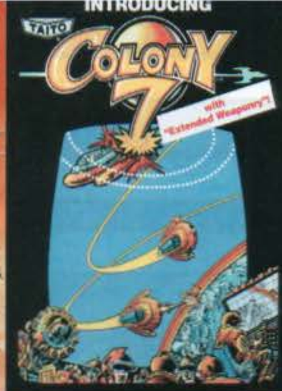




TION
BOLT
TM
© TAITO CORP. 1988



RASTAN



INTRODUCING
TAITO
COLONY 7
with "Extended Weaponry"!



ラスタン サーガ
RASTAN SAGA



サンダーフォックス



PHOENIX

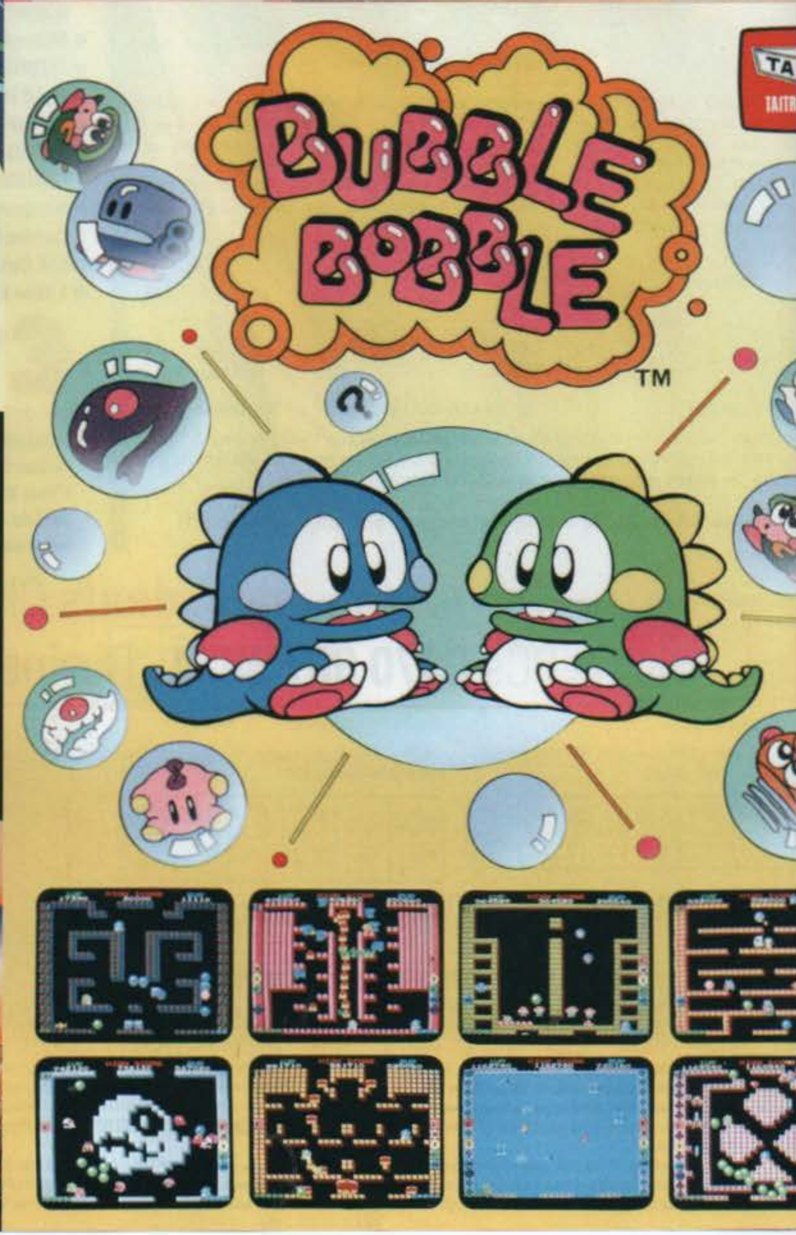




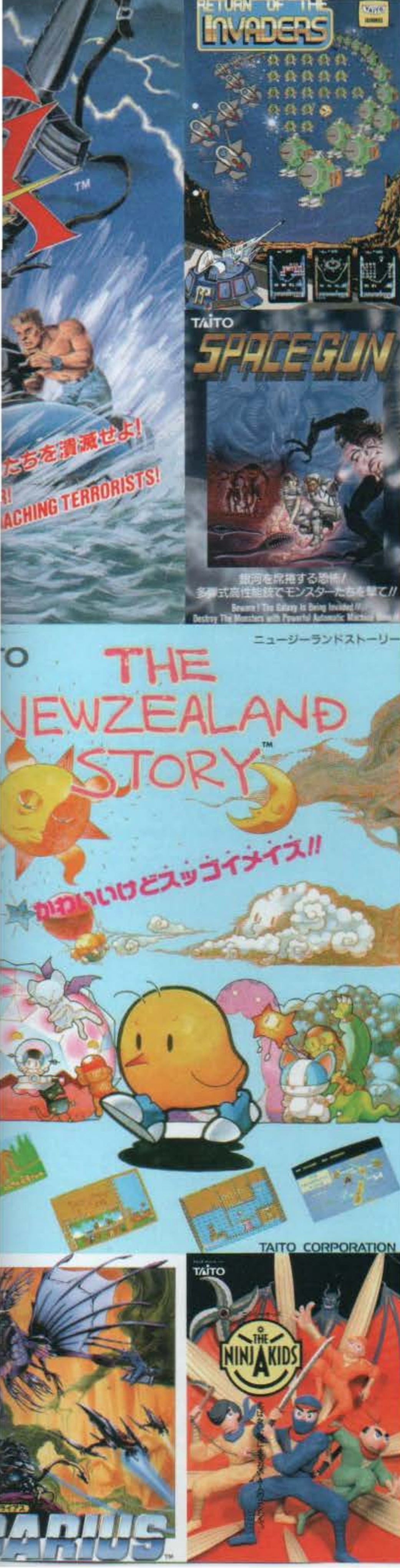
TM
TAITO F3 PACKAGE SYSTEM
風船、
フーセン



CONTINENTAL CIRCUS
OPERATION WOLF



BUBBLE BOBBLE
TM



A MAKING OF... SPECIAL
TAITO LEGENDS

With a compilation of the company's wares around the corner, we speak to two of the men behind some of Taito's biggest hits

ORIGINAL FORMATS: **COIN-OP** MANUFACTURER: **TAITO** DEVELOPER: **VARIOUS** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE DATE: **VARIOUS**

Ask a bunch of **Edge** readers which company they'd pick as their favourite classic coin-op manufacturer and you'd get back the likes of Sega, Namco and, of course, Atari. Unfairly absent, though, might well be Taito, which, despite being the name behind *Space Invaders*, has somehow never quite received the recognition it deserves.

A good look at its back catalogue reveals that there are many reasons to sit Taito alongside those more routinely cited companies, not least a hefty amount of the titles featured on the upcoming *Taito Legends*, due later this year on PS2 and Xbox. The package brings together a bundle of titles, an early demo version revealing the following line-up: *Aquajack, Battleshark, Bubble Bobble, Bubble Symphony, Colony 7, Continental Circus, Darius Gaiden, Dungeon Magic, The Electric Yo Yo, Elevator Action, Exzisus, Gladiator, Great Swordsman, Jungle Hunt, New Zealand Story, Operation Thunderbolt, Operation Wolf, Phoenix, Plotting, Plump Pop, Pop 'n' Pop, Rainbow Islands, Rastan Saga, Rayforce, Return Of The Invaders, Space Gun, Space Invaders, Space Invaders Part II, Super Qix, The Ninja Kids, Thunder Fox, Tokio, Tube-It, Volfied* and *Zoo Keeper*. Not all of these games will make it on to the finished disc (indeed, Taito may end up releasing the games over two volumes), and, as with most collections of this ilk, it's a mixed bag, offering the infamous and the obscure, a quick play of the titles in the latter category usually enough to illustrate precisely why they were not singlehandedly responsible for creating ¥100 coin shortages across Japan.

The collection is a mixed bag, offering the infamous and the obscure, the latter now proving why they didn't create coin shortages

By now you will have mentally bookmarked the titles you'll want to see in the package. Over the page we talk to two of the men responsible for the some of the games that are highly likely to be in your reckoning.







Q&A: Tomohiro Nishikado *(Space Invaders, Space Invaders Part II, Pop 'n' Pop)*





Nishikado worked on the first two *Space Invaders* titles, taking the concept from mono (top) to mono-with-coloured-bars (above). The rest is, of course, history

When you made *Space Invaders*, how successful did you expect it would be?
I anticipated it would be a hit, but never thought it will be so huge. I was delighted to see it became popular, but I did not get overwhelmed by it, because actually I was already too busy working on the next project.

How long did it take to come up with the designs for the invaders themselves?
It was not an easy job. First, I thought of making tanks or airplanes as the targets to shoot, but it was technically hard to make airplanes look like they are actually flying. Human movement would have been easier, but I felt it would be immoral to shoot humans, even if they were bad guys. Then I heard about a movie called Star Wars released in the US which was coming to Japan next year, so I came up with a game based in space which had space aliens as targets.

The alien design was inspired by The War Of The Worlds by HG Wells. In the story, the alien looked like an octopus. I drew a bitmap image based on the idea. Then I created several other aliens that look like sea creatures such as squid or crab.



The cabinet featured invaders that looked unlike the ones in the game – why was that?
Yes, it really looks like a monster. Nothing like the bitmap images. Another graphic person worked on the design. Perhaps it was made that way because the game was originally titled *Space Monster*. The graphic designer was probably inspired by the sound of it.

How difficult was it to make the game back then?
It was very a difficult process. The hardest part was the development of a microcomputer. Microcomputers were hardly used at that time in Japan, so we had to create one from scratch. I could almost say developing the microcomputer was harder than developing the game itself. These days, we have personal computers to rely on, but there was no programming environment back then. So I had to create everything by myself. I created a development device, wrote a part of the game that runs on it, and then created more devices along the way.

"Microcomputers were hardly used at that time, so we had to create one from scratch. It was almost harder than making the game"

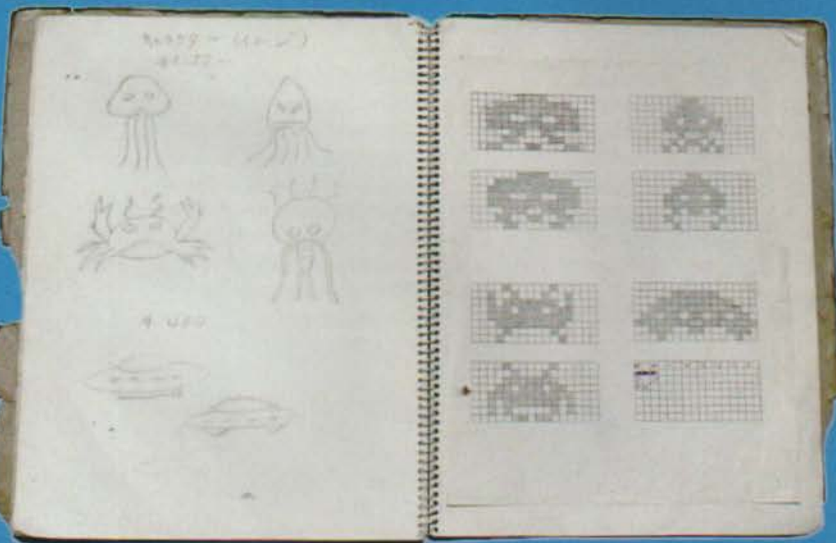


What was it like at Taito when you were making these games? Were you in competition with other designers to come up with the best games?
At that time [1978], there weren't many people creating games within Taito.

In fact, there was only one more development team besides mine. There was no competition at all, as I was actually director of the development department.

What is the reaction from people when they find out that you made one of the most famous games of all time?
Reactions are very different between Japan and overseas. In Japan, they only make some compliments, but in other countries people tend to become very excited. Many want my autograph, to shake my hand and so on.

Pop 'n' Pop was very different to the *Space Invaders* games – what was the inspiration behind it?





Nishikado's inspiration for *Space Invaders* came from reading HG Wells' War Of The Worlds. The original notes still exist today. Don't bother checking eBay





At that time, *Tetris* came out on market and it was followed by other puzzle games such as *Puzzle Bobble*, so puzzle games in general were very popular. So I came up with an idea in which targets come at the player just like in *Space Invaders*. In addition, I made the targets into balloons in order to have a cute look.

Pop 'n' Pop wasn't nearly as successful as the Space Invaders games – were you under pressure to come up with a game that was as popular as Space Invaders?
No, I did not feel any pressure. It's true it was not so successful at arcades, but it was my challenge to create a puzzle game, and I am satisfied with its outcome.

What are your memories from the time when you were making these games?
First of all, I never had a bad time during game creations. There were some difficult times such as creation of a development environment for *Space Invaders*, but I rather enjoyed it.
Personally, the most memorable game of all times is a mechanical game called *Sky Fighter*, which was my first creation at Taito. I don't think it exists any more. It was a shooting game featuring jet fighters. As it was a mechanical game, I had to work hard to make the airplane movements look real. As for videogames, I have a fond memory of a title called *Speed Race*, which may still exist somewhere. It was probably the first driving videogame ever. The game was exported to the US and became popular as well. Personally, I am more proud of that title than I am of *Space Invaders*.

What are you working on now?
I'm not personally involved in any original project right now. My company's dev team is currently making titles that were outsourced by various clients, so there are no relations with my past creations.

Q&A: Fukio Mitsuji (*Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands, Volfied*)

***Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* both feature really cute characters – how did you come up with them, and what did you want them to represent?**
This was a challenge for both titles – back then, women were rarely seen at Japanese arcades. So I thought bringing more couples would help solve this issue. That's why I designed cute characters and included cooperative play in *Bubble Bobble*.

Also, even though both of those games feature shooting, they aren't really violent – why did you make the games like that?
This would be a common answer for both titles. First, I am against any violent expressions. Also, I wanted to create a positive title.

What was it like making arcade games in the 1980s, compared to how it is today?
These days, videogames rely too much on sounds and visuals while ignoring the gameplay elements. Back then, creators could concentrate on the essential part of the game and it was possible to directly express your idea.

***Volfied* was like *Qix* – was it actually an unofficial sequel?**
Volfied has a different title and looks than *Qix*, but in fact I consciously created it as a sequel. As a sequel, I tried to emphasise depth and variety in gameplay compared to the original. When the player completes a grid, the next level can be seen through from behind. I made it this way so that the players can anticipate what's coming next. I believe this is one of the elements that makes the game more fun.

Would you like to return to your old characters with new games?
I personally do not want to be enslaved by the creation of the past. If I were to create a new game, I would like to create brand-new characters and new gameplay.

What are your memories from the old days at Taito?
For *Bubble Bobble*, I was literally working day and night in order to come up with a good concept. I worked even on holidays. I often worked through the night, and when I noticed, my room was cluttered with papers that I wrote down the idea on. It was already break of the day and I could even hear morning birds.

What are you working on now?
I have been working on training at my game design school. Rather than myself creating a new title, I look forward to my students creating many games.


Mitsuji says he's against "violent expressions" – something fairly evident from *Rainbow Islands*







Bub and Bob of *Bubble Bobble* (top) made a return (as human characters) in *Rainbow Islands* (centre), but *Volfied* (above) has nothing to do with cutesy platforming



Studio profile

Like Top Trumps, but for game dev

COMPANY NAME: Ninja Theory

DATE FOUNDED: October 2004

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 34 (figure about to double)

HEADS OF STUDIO: Nina Kristensen, Tameem Antoniades and Mike Ball



URL: www.ninjatheory.com

SELECTED SOFTOGRAPHY:
Kung Fu Chaos (Xbox), *Heavenly Sword* (PlayStation 3)

KEY STAFF:
Nina Kristensen (co-founder and chief development ninja), Mike Ball (co-founder and chief technology ninja), Tameem Antoniades (co-founder and chief design ninja), Hugues Giboire (art director ninja), Guy Midgley (lead animation ninja), Tom Colvin (lead audio ninja), Dean Calver (lead code ninja)





Heavenly Sword **(above) is going to be enormously asset-heavy, so it's little wonder that Ninja Theory is currently in the process of doubling in size**



LOCATION:
Cambridge, UK

CURRENT PROJECTS:
Heavenly Sword (PS3)

PHILOSOPHY AND TECHNOLOGY:

"Ninja Tech has been developed from the ground up to target next-generation systems. As one of the first announced PlayStation 3 developers our technology is uncompromisingly focused on squeezing the best out of that platform, putting us at the very forefront of realtime rendering technology.

"We currently have complex pixel shaders, a full atmospheric model, full-scene dynamic shadowing, HDR lighting, tone mapping, parallax mapping, internal lens reflection and depth of field, all in hi-def resolution running in realtime.

"We are researching Cell-based procedural systems for hair, cloth, clouds, water, weather and vegetation to transform our gaming world into a vibrant living vision of gorgeousness.

"Our full-on combat system works against highly skilled individual AI, against coordinated squads of enemies and all the way through to army scenarios. The Havok physics engine is being used to push character interaction within the world and within combat to unprecedented levels.

"We have positioned Ninja Theory to be a developer of uncompromising quality, ambition and talent. We are currently expanding rapidly and attracting great talent from the games, film and CG industries. To see what all the fuss is about, visit our website."





Codeshop
Tracking developments in development

The sharpest tools in the box

SIGGRAPH 2005 was the battleground for Autodesk, Alias and Softimage to reveal their latest bells and whistles



In the battle for hearts, minds and mice, companies such as Alias spend millions on marketing for events such as SIGGRAPH and the Game Developers' Conference

For a great example of the positive impact of fierce competition, economists could do a lot worse than study the 3D modelling and animation package market. Even half a dozen years ago, the sector was relatively sleepy. The software worked, usually, but upgrades came once every 18 months if you were lucky. Robustness and support left much to be desired, and access to even this quality of service was expensive, with each suite of software costing up to $10,000. Kitting out a full art team with dedicated hardware could set you back over $1 million.

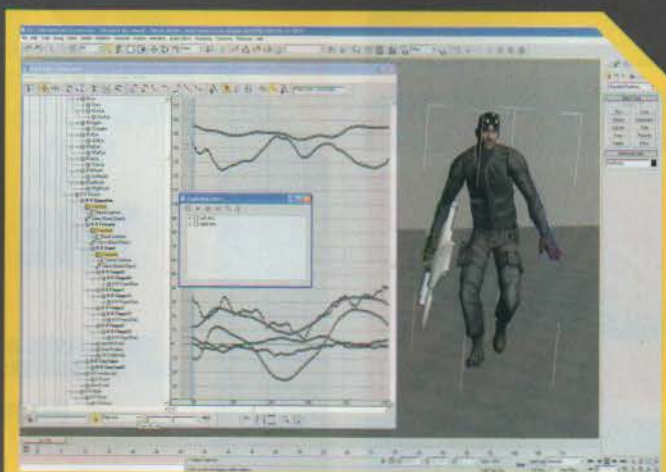
Now, the situation is radically different. Pricing has been slashed, with a professional version of 3DS Max, Maya or XSI available for less than $4,000, while commercial entry-level solutions can be bought for less than $1,000. Similarly, the industry has moved into a quicker update cycle. It took Alias two years to get from Maya 2 to 3, but since 2001, like the other companies, it's been upping the counter every 12 months.

It's certainly great news for developers, who are effectively spending less and getting more robust and complex technology. This, in turn, trickles down to gamers, enabling more visually exciting experiences. The rub, however, is for the software vendors themselves. With prices falling, they can only make more profits by expanding the overall market for their products, operating in a more efficient manner or persuading studios to switch from a competitor's package. Of course, they attempt all three simultaneously.

It's great news for developers, who are spending less and getting more robust and complex technology

It's a situation that was placed into sharp relief at the recent SIGGRAPH expo in Los Angeles. The 3D graphics world's equivalent to E3, it provided the showcase for companies to display the forthcoming versions of their software (see boxouts for specific product details). And with game studios starting to tool up for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Revolution development, it also proved a great opportunity to try and stake a claim to be the best positioned technology for the challenges of the next console generation.

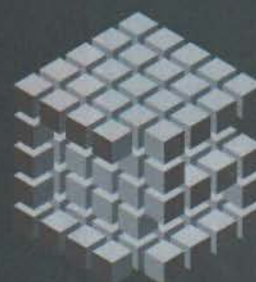
Most cheeky in this respect has been Softimage, which annoyed Autodesk at the Game Developers' Conference 2005 back in March with a special offer allowing people to switch to its XSI



Autodesk 3DS Max 8

There have been a wide range of improvements in 3DS Max 8. Everything from asset management to character animation, texturing, scripting, skinning and rendering has been overhauled. One major addition is the Asset Tracker, a source control solution which is integrated with Autodesk's Vault secure server technology. Character animation has been broken out of the internal Biped system and can now be applied to multi-legged creatures, while any motion can be mixed and edited using the Motion Mixer. Texturing has been sped up with the Pelt Map tool, which automatically unwraps 3D surfaces so flat textures can be applied without distortion. A debugger has also been added to the MAXScript scripting language to allow more complex coding for plug-ins and exporters.







Alias Maya 7

Modelling, mapping and character animation tools are the focus for the latest version of Maya. Part of this effect is the result of the company's purchase of Kaydara's MotionBuilder animation software in 2004, such that integration between the two packages has been tightened with Maya now using the same Inverse Kinematics solver. This makes it both easier to transfer models between the two as well as making more naturalistic results for animation within Maya. Other improvements include better skinning, while texturing tweaks see better tools for unfolding UV and hence speeding up the process of texturing models. More exotic changes include the ability to copy complex hair set-ups between characters and a new powerful toon-style shader for non-photorealistic rendering styles.



Softimage XSI 5

It's been a complete makeover for Softimage's XSI 5 with a plenty of new features as well as a reworking of its underlying architecture. Now known, in Softimage marketing speak at least, as having a 'gigapolygon core', the package has also been beefed up for next-gen production with support for 32bit multiprocessor or multicore CPUs as well as 64bit chips. Tools added to the package include Ultimapper, which creates surface detail for models such as normal, occlusion and light maps, and GATOR, which makes it easy to transfer materials, textures and animations between any models. Similar flexibility has been added in the form of a Shape Manager. This is an environment where artists can create, manage and animate a library of shapes.

package from Autodesk's 3DS Max for the cost of the annual Max upgrade. At SIGGRAPH it went further, targetting Maya users with what it's calling 'easy Maya migration' tools. These are designed to help experienced Maya users transfer their working methods to XSI by providing special menu and keyboard options to limit the differences between the programs.

In a way though, it only emphasises that the biggest obstacle to switching is the cost and time of retraining staff and trying to port old models, textures and animations from one package to another. It's this sort of inertia that means most studios stick with what they know best. And the news at SIGGRAPH demonstrated that, in most situations, the packages are very similar anyway.

For example, the new versions of 3DS Max and Maya will both offer better texturing and UV tools, Maya and XSI provide smoother polygon modelling options while 3DS Max and XSI have added debuggers to their scripting languages. All three have brushed up the flexibility of their character animation technology allowing artists to retarget animations between different sized models. So even if one product does gain an advantage, the continual comparison is such that the others will release their own version before too long. With competition like this, it seems everyone really is a winner.



One demonstration of how fierce the competition is between the three big software companies was Softimage's pricematch offer at GDC05, which let studios switch from 3DS Max to XSI for the $495 cost of the annual Max upgrade. With XSI v5, it's now targetting Maya users with its Maya migration tools



MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

What's fun got to do with it?

For decades, the computer and videogames industry has enthusiastically and sometimes ruthlessly plundered the wealth of its entertainment contemporaries, its authors mostly inspired by the same old sources: comic books and science-fiction television and film.

It's hardly an unpleasant or even unusual practice, especially within the field of entertainment, which tends to eat itself with desires to imitate or improve the work of others or simply as a response to a lack of imagination or the need for cynical exploitation. In recent years the tables have turned and the more established entertainment industries have been more inspired by computer and videogames, although seldom so blatantly. There's a relentless drive to make everything 'interactive' – if not directly then, like cinema, through merchandise such as toys (real and virtual).

> Today, more than ever, there's a frenzy to make anything the least bit banal or earnest more accessible, more desirable by making it 'play'

Mind you, the results are often only marginally more interactive than the electromagnetic excitation from pointing your eyes in the right direction – or at best changing channels.

It's your choice, your vote, you decide. Call now. Pay now. Your opinion is what matters, what makes the difference – mainly to your couch potato conscience. You are in control. Honest. Of course, you may not even influence the outcome because you didn't follow the herd.

Computer and videogames have also contributed to the increase in the pace of entertainment. Attention spans are reducing and people expect more change more often – an illusion afforded by more interactive entertainment. Television programmes and films cut fasterfasterfaster until it feels like every single frame is visible, like a comic book, and comfortable continuity is lost (Moulin Rouge is among few exceptions).

The editing of sublime, ridiculous and hilarious Japanese televisual headfuck Oh! Mikey is relentless to the point of painful – but exceptionally powerful. Can play ever be cut so rough? Would jumping quickly between scenes and perspectives in play reminiscent of Michel Gondry's Smirnoff advert only confuse and eventually lose players? *Made In Wario* comes close to highlighting one possible future with its quick-change act and 'old school' tempo.

Today, more than ever, there's a frenzy to make anything the least bit banal or earnest more accessible, more desirable by making it 'play' or 'fun'. Everyone else is getting in on the (inter) act... food has become toys. Maltesers are used to play Blow Football or inflated like super Space Hoppers and bounced at crazy heights throughout a humdrum city. M&Ms are transformed into insipid action figures or exploited as props to stimulate pathetic word association. And to think there was a time when we were encouraged not to play with our food...

It's a sign of the times – an appropriate, effective approach. The retention of juvenile traits into maturity – otherwise known as 'neoteny' – is rife. There's a burgeoning cult of 'kidult' and the promise of 'fun' from every pore is irresistible to the easily distracted with more money than time. Even the size of fruit and chocolate bars is 'fun' these days. (Presumably, smaller is more fun because the miniaturisation makes the product in question more like a toy.)

Anthropologists say toys address four distinct needs: mimicry, vertigo (giddiness), competition and chance; that toys give a feeling of power and significance without the danger, responsibility, or tedium of the actual subject. Curiously, 'fun' doesn't explicitly figure.

There was a time in the history of computer and videogames when the emphasis was solely on sadism, making challenges so painful because the lack of repertoire meant the only way to prolong play was to make it difficult, with the now seemingly antiquated notion of limited 'chances' or 'lives'. No pain, no pleasure. We were all masochists (and some of us still are). Even though the stick was partly replaced by a carrot in the form of the means to pay to continue play (*Lunar Lander* being an inadvertent early example), even though the 'arcade model' is inappropriate in the home, it's still commonly and blindly followed today.

What is fun? Not readily measurable, that's for sure. Doing the impossible. Getting there. Breaking the rules. Killing for 'sport'. Staring. Antici... pation. (Traditional sports seldom seem like fun. The players tend to play to win or for the cash or cachet while the fans take it so seriously it's a religious experience.) One man's fun is another man's monotony.

Why the need to pursue 'fun' as a development goal? Why chase shadows? (At least it adds an air of mystery and magic to the process.) Plenty of music, books, television, plays and films wouldn't be considered fun but they are all the more satisfying and worthwhile. Why not aim to create diversions – something to simply pass the time? Why not aim to make something 'not shit' instead of 'fun'? Why not aim to make play as convenient as possible so players are at least in a position to enjoy themselves? No, I don't have any answers.

Gary Penn began his career on Zzap!64, before working at BMG and DMA Design. He now makes games at Denki





THE GUEST COLUMN

Sticking it to The Man

Consumers don't usually rally against changes. When Coca-Cola introduced 'New Coke', no one campaigned in the supermarket, they just didn't buy it. But imagine if Coke owned your whole world, and it wasn't just the taste of the drink it could alter: it was your job, your house or even your ability to walk. You might consider arguing. That's how it is in virtual worlds: the gods are men, and, it seems, we players are as flies to wanton boys. They change us for their sport.

In January this year, *World Of WarCraft*'s developer Blizzard made some changes to the warrior class many warriors felt ruined their game. The players decided to hold an in-game demonstration. A host of a hundred gnome warriors gathered en-masse in the Dwarven city of Ironforge, then took off their clothes. It took some time for a GM to notice the naked gnomes, but when they did, the boot came down:

> Quite what the companies are afraid of, apart from the sight of 100 naked gnomes, is not clear

'Attention: Gathering in a realm with intent to hinder gameplay is considered griefing, and will not be tolerated', the GM announced. Gnomes who persisted with naked frolics were banned.

'Life is pain', William Goldman wrote. 'Anyone who says differently is selling something'. The attendant joy of virtual worlds is that, by removing our selves from our bodies, they ease our suffering. The attendant sorrow is that, of course, we don't leave our problems behind at all – they simply re-emerge in another form. Now, we mostly take for granted our ability to determine our own future, but for a long time, men were owned by other men. It seems now that our struggle for the primacy of the self is being echoed again online.

Who do virtual characters belong to? In April 2000, Sony Online Entertainment negotiated with eBay to prevent *EverQuest* players selling accounts or *EverQuest* items. Sony had applied to eBay's Verified Rights Owners Program, designed to stop people selling items they do not own the copyright to. What that means, in effect, is if you identify primarily with your virtual self – as 20 per cent of *EverQuest* players once declared they do – then Sony owns you. In this light, worlds like *EverQuest* are a new kind of bonded slavery.

SOE's *EverQuest* advertises this fact as a selling point: 'You're in our world now', it tells every player at log-on. And the carefully crafted clickthrough EULA leaves no room for doubt: it's SOE's world. It's not a democracy. In fact, the relationship is more like that of citizens and an occupying power – as was illustrated recently in *Star Wars Galaxies*. A group of players discovered a 'dupe', through which they could generate as much virtual cash as they liked. The developers, understandably, weren't happy with this threat to the game balance and their real-world revenue. They decided to ban anyone who had contact with the hacked credits, whether deliberately or not. SOE's wrath rained on the just and the unjust alike.

Players who felt they had been banned unfairly decided to protest. They gathered outside a starport on Naboo and proclaimed their innocence. Those who ignored Sony's subsequent warnings found themselves scattered randomly across the galaxy. (Online cartoon strip Penny Arcade satirised Sony's attitude: 'Sir. We have reports of player protests on Naboo', a lieutenant reports. 'I recommend we resolve this in a way that shows we respect our customers'. The Emperor holds up a crooked finger: 'Teleport them into space'.)

Quite what the companies are afraid of, apart from the sight of 100 naked gnomes, is not clear. It is perhaps a generalised, post-Cold War fear of collective people power. But even if you agree that such gatherings are inherently bad, the act of banning as a response seems a failure of the imagination. Why not take a more playful stance: place characters in a virtual jail, or hose them down with virtual water cannons?

Some are more creative. *A Tale in the Desert* has a player-run legal system which allows players to vote on bannings. Linden Labs, the developer of *Second Life*, takes the decision to ban someone seriously. It has introduced a peer review system, whereby the case for and against a potential offender is put before a random panel of longterm residents that decides whether or not the player should be ejected and exiled permanently to the real world.

Thanks to 100 years of democracy propaganda, and a century-long journey in search of the self, belief in collective action has eroded to the point where even our country's prime minister can ignore the largest mass demonstration in UK history. But elsewhere, collective action is making a comeback. In the slums of Rio, where the only government agency with any presence is the military police, 'Communidad' is all. In Argentina, where the withdrawal of the IMF has left a spiralling currency and a vacuum of bankruptcy and foreclosures, factory workers break padlocks and start up factories themselves. In Tiananmen Square, students stand in protest even in the face of death by tank. And, in Ironforge, 100 gnomes strip naked, and refuse to leave.

Tim Guest is an author and veteran videogame/technology journalist. His book, My Life In Orange, is published by Granta



Illustration: Estokes



BY MR BIFFO

BIFFOVISION

Singing from old songsheets

Some little boys want to be astronauts, or train drivers, when they grown up. Others – heaven forbid – yearn to be videogame reviewers. I wanted to be Donny Osmond. This wasn't an ambition borne from a respect of the buck-toothed dreamboat's considerable talents or swoonsome good looks. It was simply because I'd seen a photograph in my sister's Donny annual depicting him wearing a hat similar to one I myself owned.

If I listen to The Osmonds' rocktacular Crazy Horses these days it triggers a very specific, happy and vivid memory of wearing said hat, while miming along to the song, using a cardboard box as a makeshift piano.

I recently had a conversation with my sisters about the relative merits of Osmond, and the two Davids – Essex and Cassidy. They were taken aback that I was prepared to attend an all-star concert featuring the aforementioned '70s heartthrobs, despite being neither a middle-aged woman nor gay. While I'd be the first to admit these acts lack a certain degree of artistic credibility, I grew up listening to their soppy ponce-music, thanks to my sisters' refusal to purchase any record that didn't sport a cover depicting a pouting young man in a denim jerkin, rubbing his bare chest with a puppy.

Indeed, when I pause to reflect, my entire life has been soundtracked by awful music. I had the grave misfortune to lose my virginity to Berlin's Take My Breath Away. T.U.R.T.L.E. Power triggers a memory of the birth of my first daughter. And the first single I ever bought – and I still remember clearly going into Woolworths to buy it – was by Noel Edmonds, Maggie Philbin and Keith Chegwin, going under the name Brown Sauce.

Consequently, I have built a collection of CDs numbering in the thousands, and it recently dawned on me that my addiction to buying music was – in part – fuelled by a desire to recapture that ephemeral thrill of the new. I've finally realised that it's not something I'm ever going to achieve – not with new music, anyway. And not with games.

Indeed, it isn't only music which has provided such texture to my life. I recently stumbled across an *OutRun* cabinet in a high street video rental store, and could scarcely resist a game. As I listened to Passing Breeze for the first time in more than 15 years, it unexpectedly unlocked a well-buried image from a school trip to Amsterdam. The unfortunately named Kok Hotel, where we were staying, had said Sega classic in the lobby.

> It's easy as you get older to dismiss the modern as not-as-good-as-it-used-to-be. But the truth is that nostalgia idealises the past

Playing *OutRun* defrosted a terrible memory of a laughing Grant McCauley suddenly showing me his own 'kok' while we watched Bertil Boyles trump his high score. Though shaken by this powerful, if tawdry, image, I pondered about what else I had stuffed away in the musty crevices of my mind, waiting to be unlocked by a quick go on *Rolo To The Rescue* or *Jelly Boy*.

Trawling through my library of games, I discovered that Mucky Foot's unloved *GTAIII* precursor *Urban Chaos* regurgitated a feeling of elation about a new carpet, *RoboCod* reminded me of a particularly happy Christmas, and *Herzog Zwei* made my blood boil, because it brought to the surface a specific incident of being ignored at a friend's house while he played on said game, rather than entertain me. More recently, I doubt I'll ever forget that I was playing *Resident Evil: Survivor* when I heard about the World Trade Center attacks.

Consequently, all this current talk of making games 'emotional' is redundant. Games are already emotional, albeit in a mnemonic sense. Instead of trying to force the issue, perhaps developers – and Sony executives – should just shut up and concentrate on making new and hopefully thrilling gaming experiences.

As a thirtysomething gamer it's always worth remembering that every game could be somebody's first. For a time my kids were obsessed with *Tak And The Power Of JuJu*. While I dare say most of us are have either never heard of said GameCube platformer, or are united in decrying it as a bit poo, it's likely *Tak* will stay with them forever. Hopefully when they grow up they'll associate it with happy memories of the day when daddy wasn't drunk, and didn't lock them in the airing cupboard.

I may have loved *Half-Life 2*, and *Battlefield 2*, and think the DS is great, but it's unlikely they have connected with me in the way games like *Horace And The Spiders* and *Seiddab Attack* and my Spectrum did. Unless Sony's hardware boffins can develop a 'Nostagia Engine' it's unlikely any game ever will again.

It's easy as you get older to dismiss the modern as not-as-good-as-it-used-to-be. But the truth is that nostalgia idealises the past. Will Rogers may have been a rubbish, pretend cowboy, but he was spot on when he said, "Things ain't what they used to be, and probably never were."

For my money I suspect I'll continue to chase nostalgia. But when the greatest games I'll ever play remain forever in the past, it's a bit like trying to punch a shadow in the face.

Mr Biffo co-founded Digitiser, Channel 4's Teletext-based videogames section, and now writes mainly for television



Illustration: Estoke

inbox



Issue 153

I see from the Ron Gilbert interview in E152 that game designers are still obsessed with telling stories. Of course, if you really want to, you can deduce a story from snakes and ladders or poker or a football match, but the underlying activity is the playing of a game.

Most videogames have narrative threads, but if I want to be told a story I'd rather read a novel. In a game I want to overcome obstacles, achieve goals, play.

Seems to me this aspiration to storytelling springs from a misplaced desire for legitimacy. That also explains the next-gen emphasis on cinematic realism. So now you can make games that look like movies, but that doesn't mean they function in the same way. It's time the industry threw off its cultural cringe associated with playthings/toys/kids' stuff. Playing games should be nothing to be ashamed of.
John Edwards

Of course, there are more ways to tell stories than by using cinema's techniques: gaming just needs to find its own.

So, the next generation is upon us and once again the specs seem all important. I believe that this strategy is very high risk this time around and that Nintendo may take a different approach and be competitive with Revolution.

Both Microsoft and Sony are banking on multicore processors to provide them with a step change in performance for their upcoming consoles, which is the only way that this can be achieved given that the processor scaling that we have seen over the past few years seems to be reaching its limit. However, from what I have read, the development community could be up to two years away from realising the benefits of such processors, which could result in a great deal of the available processing power of these machines not being utilised.

Although not directly relevant, the comments regarding the Mac port of *Doom 3* may shed a little light on the plight of developers. Its developers stated that there'd be little benefit in optimising their code for dual-processor machines as this would yield little in the way of extra performance.

Now let's consider Nintendo. Given their focus on 'innovative gameplay', and their determined avoidance of the numbers game, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that, on paper, Revolution may not be as powerful as its competitors. However, if Nintendo releases a console with a more traditional architecture, there may not be a perceivable difference in actual game performance when compared to the competition for the first couple of generations of releases. If Nintendo, as a result, can keep the cost of their machine down and deliver interesting, fun and innovative features, they may be able to demonstrate a tangible advantage of their console over the competition at a lower price point. This would make Revolution more competitive than many commentators expect. A simpler architecture may also keep development costs lower than for the competition, also making Revolution attractive to developers.

Another reason for choosing a simpler processor may be IBM's well-documented difficulty in delivering high volumes of their high-end PowerPC processors to Apple for their high-end Macs. A simple design may ensure that IBM can deliver the necessary processor volumes to ensure that they can keep their distribution channels well enough stocked to meet demand, while there may be a higher supply risk for Microsoft and Sony.

If Nintendo can keep the cost of their machine down and deliver interesting, fun and innovative features, they may be able to demonstrate an advantage

Who knows what the next generation will actually bring? However, I don't think we should write Nintendo off just yet. The DS seems to be proving that innovation and lower costs for developers can be a successful combination; perhaps Nintendo will prove that this approach can be a success with Revolution, and, if it is, maybe it'll be the beginning of the end of the console arms race as we know it.
Ian Prince

Now, if only Nintendo had produced such a cogent summary of its intentions at this year's E3...

In the next-gen war, Microsoft is touted as having the better online experience, but I tend to disagree with this point of view.

I must say that, after two years of Xbox Live, I feel thoroughly cheated out of my money. For 60 Euros a year I believe Microsoft has very little on offer. There have only been two standout moments on Xbox Live, and those were the initial *MotoGP* demo and *Halo 2*. These games gave us lag-free and immediate gaming. It was simple to find a game, and fun to play it.

The other games on Xbox Live were a complete travesty. For the most part, it was impossible to find a game, and then to find it lag-free (something the Live network would have abolished, according to Microsoft).

All the more provoking is the fact that PC gaming offers us a far better online experience, and it's free! In an official statement made by Microsoft on their website, they claim that there is so much lag on Xbox Live because there is nobody running servers at work on corporate networks. But then, for all that money we're paying them, why not put up a couple of high-bandwidth servers themselves?

For example, why should I play *Unreal Championship* online when it has trouble connecting even four people together, while I could be playing *Unreal Tournament* online? It easily connects 16 people, it's cheaper to purchase, cheaper to play online, and easier to find games. Besides that, it's got a ton of mods. So why bother with the console version?

Downloadable content never worked either – it was simply 'unlocking' something that already shipped on the disc, completely mediocre, or something you had to pay for. And of course that would make sense because development costs money, were it not



TT applauds experimental graphical approaches, such as that of *Okami*, but says photorealism still has its place

that Xbox Live is a paid-for subscription service!

Once in a while Xbox Live will update itself, but it feels more like attempts to keep modders at bay. I'd rather see Microsoft 'unlocking' progressive scan on PAL boxes. Xbox Live 2.0 included MSN integration, but that only worked in the US, with the European divisions of Microsoft refusing to do so.

I certainly hope Microsoft will give us more bang for buck with the new Xbox 360. But to simply give Microsoft so much credit for one shining example in a pool of crap seems a little too far-fetched to me.

René Kneyber

While Microsoft does deserve plaudits for launching the most complete online console gaming service, there's no avoiding the fact that it's a flawed system serving a small market – at least right now. The free access which comes with 360 should revolutionise both of those aspects of Live. And then there are the paid-for elements...

Ace Combat 5, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*. What do they have in common? Currently I am stuck on both of them early on and in desperation viewing walkthroughs on the internet. I hate doing that as it feels like failing. I want to give up but I have paid for the story and content in these games. I want to see it and I want fun. Look, it is not a 'challenge' to have to fight a boss ten times. People have widely differing reflexes and aggravation levels. Because any one of these challenges are usually game blocking events, it locks out the rest of the game for the vast majority.

I have three children. I am in my late 30s. I love videogames but don't have as much time to play them now. I can't stand the frustration any more (not that I ever really enjoyed being asked to repeat a level or a boss over and over again).

Journalists: you face part of the blame here. By your nature you live and breathe games daily. When you criticise a game for being too short or easy you do not realise that the majority of people, both young and old, just do not have the same amount of time and expertise. Marketing departments almost certainly react to those review complaints about longevity and ask for extra levels to pad out games, or – worse – crank up the difficulty level to extend the duration. Ten hours of gameplay for you guys probably translates into 20 for most gamers.

I love the DS. Some of the games have been criticised on the basis that they are too short or just experiments – *Project Rub* or *Another Code*, for example. They are completable in five to ten hours, but I am much better predisposed to buying a follow-up to either of them as a result.

Everybody wonders why the games industry is still not seen to be as mainstream as the film industry despite having a larger revenue. This is why. I can't face another next-gen batch of games with fantastic graphics but all the game challenge flaws of the current generation. It's been like this since the 8bit era, regardless of technology. Is this why girls aren't as keen on videogames? Game developers, somebody needs a word in your ear. It is not just me: there is a thriving tips/cheats and walkthrough scene for a reason. You should view the need for these walkthroughs/cheats as a failure on your part. If the Nintendo Revolution is a continuation of the DS idea – of short, fun games – then I will certainly be buying it.

David O'Connell

There seems to be a clear trend for shorter games – and particularly shorter mainstream games – of late, but there are still few signs of the fresh thinking that is needed to ensure gamers don't become unnecessarily stuck. Some innovations – like *Leisure Suit Larry's Magna Cum Laude*'s token system, allowing players to buy their way out of challenges which bored or frustrated them – get overlooked because the games containing them aren't deemed to be classics.

I can't face next-gen games with fantastic graphics but all the game challenge flaws of the current generation. It's been like this since the 8bit era

After reading yet another rant about the graphics race I feel enough's enough. I can't believe no one has mentioned the obvious.

At the risk of sounding pompous, let me explain how it works: graphics are equivalent to special effects in movies. The better they are, the more believable the effect. Just because there exist games that don't require photorealistic graphics to achieve their aims doesn't negate the fact that there are some that do. No one will deny that King Kong with stop-motion animation is less believable than a fully animated CG-rendered special effects extravaganza and, similarly, it's a fact that a game aiming for realistic immersion like *Half-Life 2* or *Gran Turismo* succeeds more with better graphics than bad or abstract ones. The equivalent of holding up your *Tetris* and *Lumines* as an example of the lack of need for such graphics hyperbole is like pointing to American Beauty as an example of why we don't need state-of-the-art special effects.

The mistake a lot of people make is to say games with photorealistic graphics are better than your *Wind Wakers* or *Rez*. Neither is 'better', they're just different styles. Photorealism is every bit as important a style as abstractness, and advances in either side shouldn't be at the cost of the other. Of course we need more games to try out different styles, like *Okami*, but why attack those pursuing better graphics? Advances in processing power shouldn't be met with a reluctant sigh and blabbering nostalgia. More power can only mean less restraint to experiment.

I hope my point has come across clear enough. Movies were great back in the black-and-white days, but if people were happy and satisfied with Citizen Kane, there wouldn't be Star Wars. The power of consoles needs to advance: there is still so much more gameplay that can be made possible.

TT

For years I have been an avid reader of a certain well-known film magazine and a buff of the moving image in general. However, relatively recently I expressed what was possibly a mid-life crisis by purchasing an Xbox.

Continued

Since then I have also bought a GameCube – for *Monkey Ball* and *Resident Evil 4* (although the villagers with pitchforks win out here). My Xbox collection, I admit, has a certain... cinematic leaning in terms of visuals and spectacle, but then that's why one buys an Xbox, isn't it?

Highlights for me have been *Oddworld: Stranger*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, *Burnout 3* and the immortal *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*.

During this time I have occasionally purchased your magazine, but it was the coverage of the supposedly 'next-gen' consoles in E152 that I think made me decide to change my monthly reading matter. The comments and articles you gleaned and collected from individuals in the industry painted a very interesting (and sobering) picture of an emerging technology whose industry is, in the same way as the movies, at risk of losing its potential creativity and original output to the franchises, the costs of production on (possibly) overblown platforms, and the ever-present desire of the marketing bods to delude us that games can be like films.

Much of the film industry has already fallen in this sense and I don't see things improving. My feeling is that a system based on profit will always end up operating from the lowest common denominators – those of easy access and easy digestion.

Reading my film mag over the last few months, I see coverage of the same few films but in different clothing, plus a growing tendency to write articles about older 'classics' – it's the same old stuff, and when there's nothing challenging, they just write about the old stuff!

I joined the **Edge** readership because I see an intelligent magazine that is covering the rise of new technologies with the clear and vocal hope that individual vision, creative daring and a respect for the consumer may not get washed away in a tsunami of hi-res effects.

It seems to me that for the next few years, at least, this industry really is on the edge, and it's exciting to speculate: 'On the edge of what...?'
Phil Brown

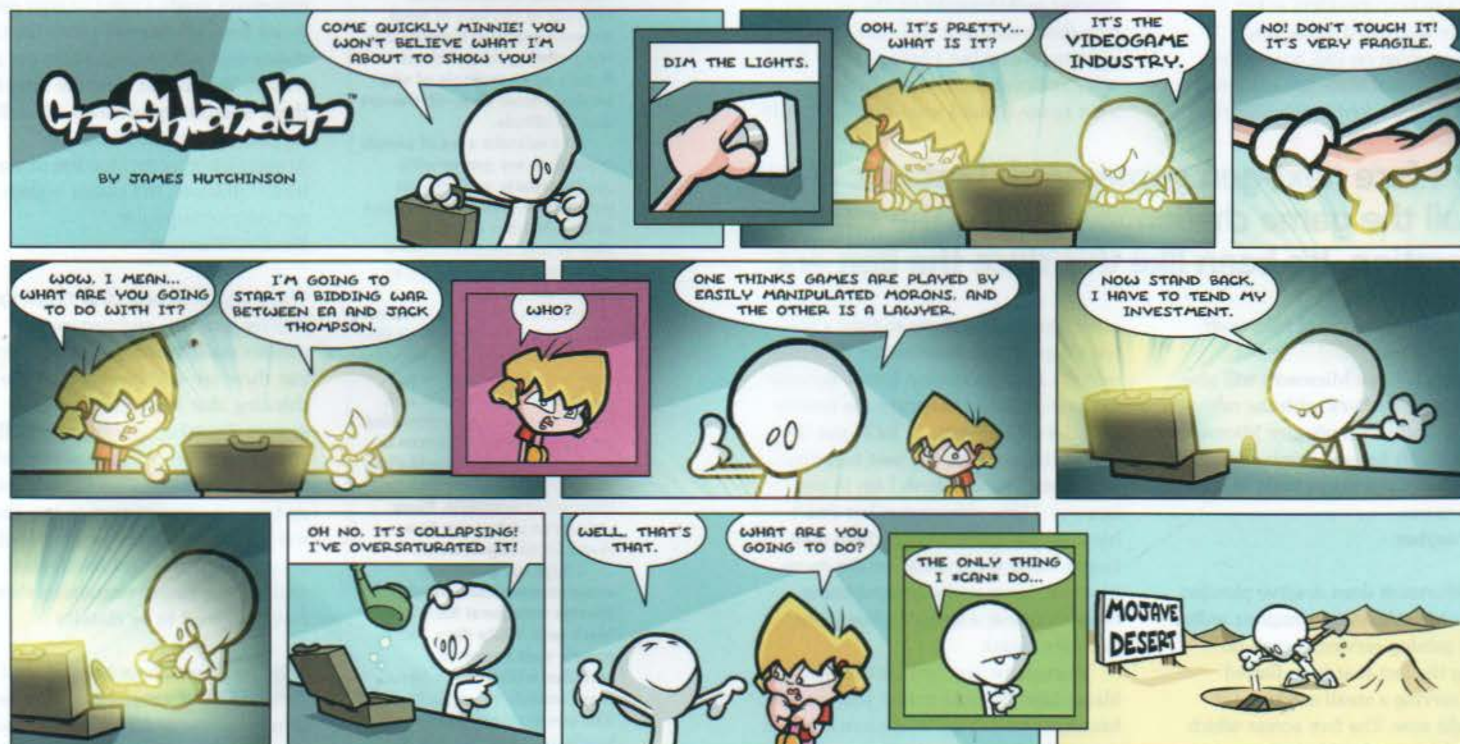
There's no doubt that videogaming is being pulled between the goals of commercial success and creative ambition. Those that want the latter need to shout louder – and stay as well informed as possible – to make their case heard. The magazine you're reading right now will remain the best place to do both.

Reality sucks... big time. I mean, why can't we go around smashing cars, fighting in bars, stealing, looting and engaging in a lil' bit o' shooting?

OK, that's just stupid, but the last time I checked, it was legal to have sex. Why then is it that the secret (don't make me laugh) unlocking of the Hot Coffee mode in *San Andreas* has caused such a stink? It's probably the only legal thing you can do in the game. Two cartoon people having mild rumpy pumpy... Have the people in high places gone mad?
Che Campbell

Short answer? Yes. Double standards for sex and violence are endemic, but this one spills into farce.

Send us email **(edge@futurenet.co.uk)**, but be sure to use 'Inbox' as the subject line. Or send a letter to this address: Inbox, **Edge**, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW

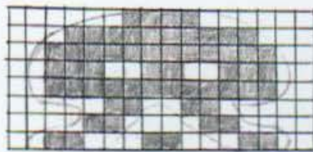


Visit the Crashlander archive at www.crashlander.com/edge



Next month

Edge 155
on sale September 29










Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION
OCTOBER 2005
£4.00
10
9 771350 159038